The Long Journey

Christopher Columbus

Mary Bidwell Near

THE LONG JOURNEY

Part Five

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

The present volume is a translation of Christofer Columbus, *the fifth and concluding part of Jensen's historical cycle,* Den Lange Rejse (The Long Journey) *which is now complete in English in three volumes. The two already published are:*

I Fire and Ice
II The Cimbrians

THE LONG JOURNEY

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

by

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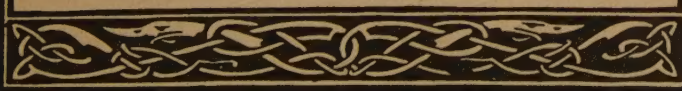

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mitted their children to his protection. Everybody was called Christopher, but Columbus when at the summit of his responsibilities felt convinced of his successorship to the carrier of Christ. Therefore the legend of Saint Christopher in its natural interpretation, Christianity accepted in primitive fashion, belongs to the antecedents which went to form Columbus, it contains the taste of the race.

His feeling Columbus derived from early impressions of the Gothic, which is the form under which Northern peoples have adopted the spirit of Christianity. It was an intensity of thought, which was rooted in the Northerner's memories and extended them beyond the finite, that created the pagan-christian myth of God's Mother. In its nature the myth is purely Northern; the name is all the Holy Virgin has left of her biblical origin. Christianity demanded soul, adoration, of the pagan, and he gave what he had to give, what to him was sacred, Woman as Virgin and Mother. He centred his religion upon a beautiful ancient devotion to Woman, and in her honour his imagination refashioned his Forest and his Ship into a Cathedral. Columbus was a child of the Gothic; we must seek its genesis if we would know how his nature came about; we must go backward in the youth of the race to the prototype of the myth of God's Mother, the heart of the Gothic. Columbus inherited it in the form of universal longing: the eternal feminine; the Holy Virgin was the woman in his life. *Santa Maria* was the name of his ship.

Forces which point back to lost elements in his origin, but whose tendency was influenced from elsewhere, di-

rected Columbus onward in search of a world he was never to find.

Deep-lying Northern instincts were crossed and dominated by surface currents from the world that had shaped his consciousness, the Southerner's world, the local stamp, the stamp of his time; he behaved now as an Italian, now as a Spaniard, always as a Christian; an inner illusory world stood between him and Nature, which he still regarded with the prejudiced eyes of his day, several realities one within another, like the heavens of that age, and all of them fairly independent of experience, in conformity with the contemporary *imago mundi*—and yet Columbus went clean through all imaginary realities and came out with a new one.

Pure and monumental was that quality in him which made this possible: courage, a complete dauntlessness which he had received as a heritage from ancestors who were conquerors and colonists and to generations of whom uncertainty and playing for high stakes had become the very form of their existence. Courage and endurance, the sailor's daring, inflexibility of purpose, are the clean line which runs through Columbus's character as a discoverer. He was a sportsman, and he was a man of genius, his motives rose superior to his age; where he regarded his voyage as a mission the elements were at work within him, he pressed on as though the whole of human nature had been pressing upon him.

Personally, on the other hand, as an individual, such as his bringing-up and his circumstances had made him, he gave proof of a mixture of qualities, magnificence and pettiness which are difficult to reconcile, prophetic vision and a weakness in direct judgment, a certain dizziness in

Only he in whom the past is stowed is freighted for the future. Columbus grows with the bearing of his exploit; we see, however, looking backward, that history passed through his heart. As he stands, he bears a bridge which joins widely separated worlds and epochs. He sets up a boundary between illusion and reality, not by what he thought but by what he was and what his passion gave an impulse to.

In a strange, tragic and grandiose way a magnificent error coincides in his destiny with total disillusionment, which nevertheless proves fruitful; he leads the way through to a new reality though he loses himself. He is the most disappointed man in history:

> For when he found the saving isle
> Gone was his dream.
> A world arose to sever him
> From the uttermost stream.
> Then grew thy heart's great longing,
> Conqueror in defeat returning,
> And bore, like the billow's burden,
> The world's eternal yearning.

Columbus completes the Northern migration and at the same time renders Christianity impossible as a terrestrial dream. The Kingdom of Heaven he sought was the Bible's mystical abode, Paradise; but then he sought it on earth. He knew not that it was rooted in his nature. He sails for the Indies, means Paradise, and finds the New World—doesn't it look as if the Almighty, or Somebody not so good, was playing a game with him? And yet he makes the discovery!

In the person of Columbus the pagan yearning for Nature unites with Christianity's *fata Morgana*—and they perish

together! It might be said that Columbus, regarded as the hero of a tragedy of destiny in which the elements are too strong for him, is the first modern man, the first god-forsaken figure; he substitutes space and reality for the spiritual prison and the superstition of the Middle Ages. But the modern age is founded upon acquisitions which came after him; other brains with trained qualifications he did not possess shattered the *imago* he believed in and enlarged the world; he had brought it within range of vision but himself died unenlightened.

We must therefore look on him as a man of his time, such as heredity and experience had made him; we must see what he saw with the eyes he had, as an adventurer, a visionary, a gambler and a victim, with his brief glory and long renown, as skipper of the caravel which bore him with the rest of its medieval cargo—and which stranded upon that coast where he knocked and knocked and was not to be admitted. But his achievement points to the ancestry behind him, and when it passes into other hands, and he is forgotten, it is nevertheless he who is its protagonist.

What remains, however, the real event in his life is the oldest and most universally human of all, what we all sail for and bring home, the loss of hope:

> Christopher Columbus, thy silver hair,
> Frosting thy poll,
> Crowns the sea-chilled viking brow
> And the wreck of thy soul.
> Thou gav'st us back Earth and didst enter
> Immortality's murmurous seeming.
> Now covers thy mighty shadow
> The ne'er-reached goal of thy dreaming.

The voyages of discovery, which were the work of many,

are inevitably connected with Columbus as their central figure. And of all the discoverers he was in fact the one who was governed to the widest extent by the idea of discovery.

When the world had become known in its entirety, more or less, and America had been added as another continent, a conception grew up and spread among seamen, spontaneously and vaguely as is the way of popular legends, of a skipper who might be met with at sea, a phantom in a phantom ship: the Flying Dutchman.

It is as though the old Northern roving impulse, made homeless when all seas had been sailed, and the earth circumnavigated many times, had passed into a myth, a voyage which can never end, the skipper who cannot die. Right in substance but fortuitous in form, the tale of the spectral ship is connected with the name of a Dutch captain, or perhaps we may rather say it hangs in the air—ought it not in reality to be referred to Columbus? It belongs to his myth as its last act. For it is the *Santa Maria* that is the phantom ship, Columbus is the restless skipper-soul who is condemned to sail the seas until the Day of Judgment.

Unblest is he whose aching desire
Can never die.
The ocean swell so drear and waste
Goes heaving by.
There stands the fettered skipper, steering
His ship of spectres weary
Under the pallid moonbeams,
In the ocean swell so dreary.

This spectre is the heavily laden, non-existent but terribly real phantom ship which we call history, the memory of mankind.

Of this ship Columbus is captain. A numerous crew sails with him, lesser and better men than he, seekers and strivers, who are all condemned to continue their lives in an image; as the one who lost most and gained most he is captain of the Dead.

In this vessel we are now to sail.

BOOK ONE
THE CATHEDRAL

I

UNDER YGDRASIL

SOME time in the Iron Age it chanced that a hunter lost his way in the forest while pursuing a deer, and reached a tract where he had never been before.

When at last he had brought down the deer and was sitting on it to rest, still angry from the exertion the hunt had cost him, he noticed that the trees here were strikingly bigger and mightier than anywhere he knew—nothing but lofty stems and airy tops, with only a carpet of herbage below, neither brushwood nor swamp as in other places; the spot where they grew stood higher than the surrounding land, like a raised floor, lifting a grove of tall trees up above the roof of the forest like a dome; it seemed a Thing-stead where the giants of the forest had assembled to take counsel together.

The huge slender trunks united their foliage high high up to form a spreading tent of leaves which shut out the sky but not the light; green, cool, resonant halls where sound carried so that the twittering of a single finch made quite a din, as though its tone swelled here of itself. The slightest sound was repeated and multiplied under the leafy vaults: echo, the voice of solitude; here was perfect solitude.

It was many leagues within the forest; from the high place under the big trees you could look over endless silent stretches of wood, dense forest and glades about

watercourses and lakes, and again woods and woods, as far as the eye could reach, on three sides; but on the fourth there was a view of a great river which swung in a long bend with one bank against the foot of the rise, as though it had a message to bring; it was a broad, rapid river with a deep bed, which hurried along and raised eddies on its surface as it went; on both banks it was enclosed by virgin forest; only an opening here and there in the sedges showed where the beasts had trampled paths to ancient watering-places along the river. It flowed through the woods from a distant region where blue outlines showed that there were mountains, and it ran on through the lowlands to the horizon on the other side. The hunter's practised eye noted ospreys above the eddies; there were good days to be had with a line, as a change from hunting, if one lived here.

In a cleft on the slope below the trees the weeds grew knee-high, there was a hidden spring; the hunter pressed the back of his hand down into the soaking cushion of moss till it filled with clear water, and slaked his thirst; then he returned to the deer he had brought down, cut his arrows out and began to flay the big, heavy beast, with his knife now in his hand, now in his mouth, working with his knuckles between hide and carcass first on one flank and then, as he took the beast by the horns and turned it over, on the other, till the hide was off. When this was done he quartered the carcass and hung the pieces up on the nearest tree. The frontal bone and antlers he cut out and set up on a bough, for that belonged to the spirits of the place. Then he straightened himself and wiped his greasy hands on the back of his breeches, unrolled a leather pouch and took out a scrap of tinder which he placed on his flint between thumb and forefinger, then

drew the steel along the sharp edge of the flint; sparks flew out between his hands, brighter even than the daylight, and at once a glowing spot in the touchwood began to smoke; he knelt and blew gently upon the glow, raking dry leaves together with one hand and bending quite low with his face to the ground; smoke curled upward about his head, he made a nest of his hands and nursed it, until at last he rose and at the same instant a flame licked up the heap of leaves. Not long after he had a fire. Then he sharpened a stick with his hunting knife and roasted kidneys on it over the fire, ate and chewed and went to the spring for a sip of water, all in profound silence, which was nothing strange since he was alone.

In a tree close by there was a hole left by a fallen branch, and in it lived a starling; at intervals it came out of its door and flew away, and after a little while it returned with several worms packed together in its beak and flew in a straight line into its hole, like an arrow aimed from a distance at a mark; and when it had disappeared a feeble smothered cheeping could be heard from the hollow in the tree.

Now and then the hunter's eyes wandered as he absently ate, swallowing big lumps at a time; the wood was alive around him and he knew it, he was one with it, saw the squirrel steal into a tree spreading its legs out on the vertical bark with tail erect, now behind the trunk and now back again on a fork higher up; he saw it as the brisk little red creature it was, until it disappeared among the foliage and other things attracted his attention. The forest attended to its affairs, like a great calm business in which everything got done by all concerned, in silence and away from each other. Far off, as though behind many partitions, the woodpecker was heard beating his tattoo on a

sonorous dead branch; high up, from the secret chambers of the sunny tree-tops, from the sweet green light itself, came the thick cooing of the wood-pigeons, a mother full to the throat with happiness. The finch called now and again, making a great noise for such a little creature and rousing echoes in the wood; it had its nest and was as happy as a horse, though it was so small that the least twig could support it. The flies buzzed and excited themselves, spinning wildly in a wheel in the midday fires, and one would fall on a leaf and whiz around on its back, quite dizzy; the sun made the thing bewildered.

The cry of a bird of prey was heard above the tree-tops; down below there was a sniffing under the bushes, and the hunter shrank together as he sat, stopped munching in the middle of a bite: it was the badger come out in the middle of the day with two half-grown young ones, striped in the face and powerful of body; she was out teaching her young to root; she turned the earth with her paw and sniffed, and the young ones turned the earth with their paws and sniffed; but the hunter began to chew again: it was not the time of year, their skins could stay on till another opportunity.

When the hunter had finished his meal he looked up at the sky and guessed what time of day it was—something after midday, ladders of haze leaned steeply down from the tree-tops into the shadow, the wood was very still, with only a busy hum of flies and the cry of a buzzard above the tree-tops. The hunter yawned and worked his jaw, shook his head; he had been on the trail since before sunrise and all the long forenoon, running almost uninterruptedly in a straight line the whole time, so who could tell where he was now? And now he would have to go all that long way back—how long he did not know. But

the food and the strong smell of the fire had made him sleepy; he yawned again and shivered and lay down to take a nap on the grass by the side of the fire.

When he awoke it was late. He jumped up.

The wood had filled with dusk which poured in among the roots of the trees and rose nearly to their leaves, but the sunlight still came through. It had come on to blow a little, and the leaves above were in motion and shook blue glimpses of the sky and green and red and yellow patches of light together; in the west a purple glow behind the trunks showed how low the sun had sunk. Other birds than before were heard now, and they had made for the topmost twigs, where they mingled their long, flute-like, questioning notes with the vanishing twilight. Down in the depths of the wood all was dark and still.

The hunter knew that he would have to carry a big load of meat many leagues through pathless forest before reaching human habitations; he had overslept himself, and saw with uneasiness that he would have to spend the night in the open. He quickly decided to stay where he was, rather than halt at some other place down in the dense swampy woods, and while it was yet light he looked about among the big trees for a comfortable fork between two branches where he could ride out the night in safety, even if there was not much chance of sleep. When he had found what he wanted, he laid more fuel on the fire and collected dead wood, getting ready for the night as a man does on such occasions; but he was uneasy. He dragged up big fallen branches so as to have more than enough, sweating and making a noise; he made a sort of attempt to sing, but broke off again. And when he had made ready for the night he kept quite quiet. In the fading sky the moon

came out and began to gain power; he dropped his eyes before it, the sky was over him, he could not hide from it.

And gradually as the sun sank, the forest became strangely sombre and stiff, cold blasts from it struck upon the hunter, making him shiver beside the fire, for there was a life in the draught which touched him to the marrow. The air grew thick with all kinds of dumb things that gathered therein. The fire and the darkness augmented each other —the more light the fire gave, the blacker looked the wood. Soon the hunter found himself in a sort of cave of light, where only the nearest tree-trunks stared in the gleam; beyond was thick darkness, the ancient black evil Night.

He looked up, and his soul received a shock, for there were the stars: he was, as it were, in the centre of an immense cave with starry walls, the big familiar constellations stood out over his head—the Great Bear wheeling upon its own length, Orion blustering in the sky, the Pleiads flickering in the wind of eternity, now clearing their stars, now shrouding them in luminous haze, the Milky Way above them all, whose soul is giddiness; radiant and dumb as ever were the stars, with a gaze not to be sustained, the sky full of eyes, all the stars blinking, and between them space with its solemn deep-blue voice; fearful was the starry heaven, and the hunter was abashed before it and bent his neck, shook himself, rubbing his numbed hands together; he was but a poor hunter.

His eyes dropped from one marvel to another, but with this one he was familiar—the world of fire. He looked into his fire and blinked his dazzled eyes, comforted as though by a caress; the fire licked and shot up a flame, it was his friend. And, without giving it a thought, he

fetched the entrails of the deer and flung them on the fire. For a moment they almost overcame it: the fire turned black and gasped for breath, the clammy guts and their contents threatened to smother it; but soon the flames grew about them on every side and began to feed upon the entrails as they became charred; the fire puffed strangely and gave off fat worms of smoke, running over the shrivelled skin in many colours before the flame found a place where it could bite and fix itself.

Long and deliciously the fire gave off its fumes, with little cracks, scorching and blistering and feasting itself, and long the hunter sat with dazzled eyes which now saw nothing when he turned them from the fire, sunk in deep thought, fascinated by the fire and what was going on within it, where he divined an infinity before which he humbled himself in his heart.

Then the hunter heard footsteps. He seized his long ash bow, rose and turned a terrible face to the darkness—fear and a mortal challenge together. The footsteps ceased, and then he was aware of a sound of wailing close at hand, the very note of terror; he gave a violent start, and with a roar drew his bow to the arrow-tip; there was another wail, with more fear in it, and then his eye suddenly fell on a figure that had come into the light of the fire, a vision that had appeared out of nothing, a human figure, a woman; she sat down at once when she knew that he had seen her, and stayed sitting with her feet on the grass. The great arrow with its iron point would have gone clean through an ox at such short range, and she expected it; but then the hunter blew the breath violently from his nostrils, transferred bow and arrow to his left hand and went up to her, relieved of a nameless terror. She rolled over on

her back with limbs in the air as he approached, exposed her stomach to ingratiate herself and made painful barking sounds as in a bad dream, whimpering appealingly, unable to defend herself or fly.

It was a woman, quite a young one, who also must have lost her way in the forest and had followed the light of the fire. They were unknown to each other; she belonged to another people and could not say much for herself, but it did not take many words to bring them together; and soon after the strange girl was sitting very confidingly and seriously by the fire, preparing venison for supper.

It was a good thing they had met. When people have lost their way and have to stay out at night it is a misfortune to be alone. Now that they were two the hunter gave the starry sky a casual glance and let fall a remark about its being a clear evening, didn't she think? They turned their backs upon the world, except the hearth and the spit, made a hearty supper and then thought of going to rest, there was nothing to stay up for.

The forest is always the home of the accursed when it is dark, the owl hoots in a lofty tree so that the woods ring again; it goes to one's very marrow even if one knows it is the owl. "Grou, grou," says a beaky noise just above the tree-tops, and a strident beating of wings is heard, rising and dying away again in an instant: wild duck, or something much worse; why else should it give one such creeps down the back?

A ghastly white light begins to haunt the tree-tops; it is the moon, that spectre of the skies. Far away there are shrill cries and answering cries among the slopes from one knows not what horror; a bent bough on a tree near by broods like a black and twisted dragon against the noc-

turnal sky; every visible shape crouches to become a great monster with horns and snout.

Even the breeze from the dark woods is unbearable upon one's neck, one feels that there are great ringed eyes in the air behind one's back, and now the best thing to do is to hide, a couple of little humans chilled by the dew, who are heavy-hearted and hold each other by the neck; and that is what they did, these two—lay down and pulled the fresh deerskin right up over their heads with the raw side out for all the ghostly things to bite at. They were in their own cosy darkness now and lost themselves in it, while the fire burned down and the moon advanced over the tree-tops out into the floating nocturnal sky, across which it was to travel before day came again.

The finch's call and an airy chorus of rooks in the lofty trees waked them; the light, the day, a lovely sunny spring morning; the great shining trees stretched down green arms to them; she sat up and shook the deerskin from her head, awake at once, and uttered a joyful cry.

But as the hunter opened his eyes he looked straight into a marvel, the sunrise appearing at the roots of the woods between the trees like a mighty rose of light, leaves, sky and sun merged in a radiant ring of green, blue and purple, the world dissolved in colour! As a sea of blood he had seen the sun go down the evening before, on the other side of the forest, a rose of coloured fire as now, all the refracted colours of light in which the sun, the woods and the day were merged and sank—and now this vision! It was to be bound up for ever with an awakening, a dawn in his stern hunter's soul, which understood what a gift the night had given him and at the same time made it

inconceivable, a glory in the soul of boundless dreams he had had and could not remember, the reflection of another existence which had been near to him. As though petrified in the middle of a gesture, seized by a thought which made all else stand still within him, he looked out into the dawn; his very breath was checked, so immersed was he in an inner world though without being able to realize it, a lost memory.

They stayed together, the two whom the night had joined. Neither of them ever took the homeward path; they settled on the spot as a free hunter's household in the midst of the kindly woods, and in summer their life was easy. Neither of them was aware of time.

For the winter they made themselves snug in an underground dwelling without ever once feeling the want of human society. The woods took the place of friends; they loved the grove with its tall friendly trees because there they had found each other. Beyond that she had no world at all but him, and he had his own.

Once in the course of the summer the hunter saw four ships on the river, long black craft with a multitude of oars which all moved together like a loom; slowly they fought their way up stream, in sight for a whole day before they vanished in a bend of the river towards the mountains; long-handled axes were raised with a backward lean along the ships, like vipers stretching their necks to strike, and the regular chunk of the oars against the timber was heard hour after hour as the crews obstinately worked their way against the stream. They had come up from the lower reaches of the river, no doubt from the sea, and whither were they bound? The hunter never saw them return.

Occasionally he saw men over on the other side of the

river, people who came out of the woods shading their eyes with their hands from the southern sun; but they could not cross here and withdrew into the forest to find other ways.

With the exception of these signs of an outer world, the hunter and his woman lived undisturbed on the lonely wooded hill by the river.

But as early as the end of the summer there were unmistakable signs that the girl was to become a mother—from eating raspberries, as she supposed in her own mind. They had eaten raspberries together in the woods, and as the new being had made itself felt at the same time it was natural to conclude that that might be the cause; she ate herself quite big, and then it came, and big she remained. She gave birth to the child in the middle of winter and wrapped it in kid's skin against the cold.

It was a warm and wet, pink, naked little thing, which as soon as it was born chirped like a bird and had little closed hands, and nails like buds on trees, tiny little twisted ears and new-born hair like sunshine, eyes like the hazy blue sky and a sorrowful mouth which immediately sought and sought and fell to on Mother's breast.

A nasty storm had swept through the low dwelling in the ground, where the mother had screamed as though some unknown cruel beast had been there, but now all was still, the little boy's babbling sounded like the song of birds on the first warm night of spring, when the great storms that tear the ice from the shore and break the trees of the forest have blown themselves out.

And the first he saw of the world was the spring. She carried him out for the first time when the trees had

burst into leaf, and in speechless joy showed his blue eyes to the sky and his hair to the sun and his hands to the new-born leaves on the blessed green beeches.

Without any doubt it was a splendid and wonderful child, a little baby god, a son of the sky and the sun and the woods, that the ecstatically happy mother had brought into the world.

But the hunter who had become a father was enraptured with his partner and his springtime child.

She sat out in the open, now that it was warm, on the slope under the big trees, which flamed like calm green fires in the sun of May, just where they had met a year before; and in her arms she held her son, a thirsty son who guggled at his work and let the milk run out of his nose in two streams when he could not swallow it all at once. He lay on his mother's knee simply stiff with overnourishment, with his fat, bare feet, each with five rosy toes, pointing in different directions; and when his mouth ran over and he began to choke his mother lifted him with laughter and admiration high in the air and shook him to let the food settle down, so that there might be room for more. Sweet was the scent of the two, and delicious was the fragrance of the still wet leaves on the tall shining beeches. And with the baby in her arms and a dream of happiness on her sweet flushing face the mother followed the starling, that black glistening bird which slipped in and out of the hollow tree with worms in its beak for its nestlings within.

When the hunter was not in the woods or by the river supplying the needs of the family, he was at home, busily building a new, real house. He worked and chipped at the wood and was always beginning again on a grander scale, he had visions of something magnificent and well

thought out: a speaking house, he imagined, with images on the posts, which should make manifest his joy and form a precious shrine for the mother and her little god.

Up on the mound among the trees the hunter had a secret, secluded place of prayer which he used to visit alone—nothing but a heap of stones on the ground, on which he made a fire for the Powers when he gave them a share of his quarry; here he cut up the deer and hung them on the trees, and it answered very well; here he left a bit on one side for the badger who had his hole on the slope and was no ordinary badger—he lived in the ground underneath one, and it was as well to be on good terms with him; and every year at the solstices the hunter made ceremonies for the Powers, quite privately between himself and them. He made burnt offerings for the return and perpetuity of all things, walking cautiously about and mumbling a good deal with his lips—prayers by the look of it, but some part was strong language he had learnt, which he hoped might work upon the Powers and bind them even against their will—for one's position was not altogether a comfortable one in dealing with beings so much stronger than one's self.

But latterly he had got out of the way of appealing to them in the open air; the hunter was more occupied with his house and what it was to shut out, and with the glory and perfection which it was to shelter like a little improved world.

The hunter was becoming more and more of a carpenter. He worked and built all through the summer, and in winter he pondered over his images and shaped them in wood, at times so absent that he might gaze long at his dear ones without seeing them, entirely lost in his visions.

But the two were always about him, giving food for his work; he heard their voices, and he heard the neighbouring spring and the song of birds in the trees as one and the same music, while his thoughts were budding and his hands were shaping. He heard the mother singing, a wordless cooing from the heart which she had learnt from the wood-pigeons; she took the child's feet in her mouth and pretended to eat them, making him laugh so that his little chest clucked; she called him by pet names of her own invention. "My morsel," she would say, with heartfelt emotion, as she played with him; "my sweetest little knucklebone; my darling, darling little dick!" This meant "bird" in the wonder's own language which he was beginning to invent for the wonders about him as he tried to catch them in his hands, stammering expressions for what he wanted, and they were the foundation of an entirely new little language in the forest.

And when his mother had got the wonder dressed she put him out on her knees as on a promontory so that the world might see him, and he it, and made a fortification around his little defenceless body with her sweet, big girlish hands. All the flowers stretched themselves on their stalks among the grass to make a show for him about the place where the two were sitting, the trees shed fragrance upon them, the birds came out on the farthest twigs and chanted a triumphal chorus over this forest picture of childhood. The mother herself sang songs of joy over her miracle, without words, inarticulate hymns of praise that gushed from her throat and woke echoes in the woods as of an enchanted source, a source with the voice of a girl. She was so loving and so full of laughter.

And tender songs of praise and great joy resounded

from the hunter's house when at last he got it finished and lodged the two within. It was as though the house, standing by itself in the forest, gave out music; it sang in the midst of the wood, the whole house sang with the happiness concealed within it.

It was built with walls of upright timbers, like a palisade, very firm, which was the first consideration, but with a riot of decoration and with meaning in its plan and all its details. From the lofty gables dragons gaped towards the four quarters of the heavens; above them, still higher up, four more; for upon the roof over the smoke-hole rode a lofty, slender castle, and above it again was a spire which ended skywards in a pole with a vane, and here the cock crowed, always *against* the wind by which it turned; it stood on guard up in the airy regions, and the first gleam of sunrise fell upon its comb. The dragons on the roof were, of course, to keep evil spirits away from the house; besides them the skulls of deer and other game were set up on the sods of the roof, with the double intention of scaring and providing a good hunting memory. Above the door the hunter set up the antlers of the first deer he had brought down in this place; for it was the very entrance to his happiness, the deer had brought him here.

The door was at one end of the house, the plan of which was an oval, and the doorposts rose high above the eaves; they were two whole straight stems; each of them had meant the destruction of an oak, but they had risen again in a higher form, carved all over with the most beautiful sinuosities of oak-leaves and terminating above in a great ornamental acorn.

The door itself was a single oaken plank—an old tree

had gone to make it; it had two round panels for the sun and moon, filled with carvings and circles in every conceivable pattern.

The whole exterior of the house was to be a symbol of night, terror and counter terror: the four cornerstones which supported the house were four crouching monsters which were here bound and made to do good much against their will; the dragons explained themselves, they were the personification of Nature's terrors. At a little distance the house really looked like a hideous nest of serpents with the heads of the whole brood raised in rapacity; it was a powerful outside to turn towards the night, for with evil must evil be expelled.

But the inside of the house represented the ash Ygdrasil. Of course, it was a room, and the meaning of all the carvings and embellishments was not apparent at first glance, and yet all the imagery of the forest and the ash Ygdrasil was present. From the middle of the floor rose the great pillar which supported the whole building and the topmost point of which formed the spire; it was a mast, an old fir, perfectly straight but twisted many times about itself in the wood, as though while growing it had turned to follow a heavenly body; it formed the stem, the carvings in the roof and round all the walls were the branches and foliage of the world-tree.

It was like being in a transformed forest, foliage above and below, and in the branching patterns the deer moved with his branching crown intermingled with the crowns of the trees, one could scarcely tell which was tree and which was deer; high up in the top of the world-tree sat the eagle, the far-seeing one, and between its brows a hawk, one bird of prey crowning another; the squirrel hid and appeared downward among the branches like a weaver's

shuttle, Ratatosk running with his news up and down the ash Ygdrasil between the eagle and Nidhug, the dragon of Time, who lay under the roots of Ygdrasil devouring them. Ginnungegap was there, below another root of the world-tree, a frozen hole in the earth wherein frost giants brooded with their heads between their knees; Mimi's well was shown, with Odin's eye which he gave as a pledge for a draught of wisdom; Urd's well, and the Norns taking water and mud from the spring to heal the world-tree of the gnawing in its root and top. If you looked up again, there was the rainbow overhead and great constellations, the eternal stars of heaven depicted; and again foliage, great plaited tents where the leaves were birds and the birds leaves. But at the top, in the middle of the roof, where the window was, the light fell in; you could not see the sky itself but the dim light that came through the smoke-hole, light from above met smoke and the gleam of the fire from below; the daylight above changed with the time of day, paled and took fire again, like a coloured, translucent and veiled halo over the room.

Such was the house of images the hunter-carpenter had raised, that he might give back his soul to what had produced it.

Most of it was still in the rough, not all carried out as he saw it in his mind; far from it, there was work enough for years to come—and already an entirely new plan was dawning in his head, to begin all over again, in a new, wider, still more eloquent style.

Then it chanced that one day the hunter was again pursuing a deer which would not let itself be taken, and which led him farther and farther away, until at last he no longer knew where he was.

The chase and the speed of it excited him so far beyond all bounds that he ceased to be human, he was nothing but passion; in his heat he took no note of anything, and nothing could stop him until he had overtaken the deer and brought it down. He was a hunter who had never suffered any game to beat him, either in endurance, sagacity or strength.

But this was a most extraordinarily powerful stag, it seemed. The hunter was used to finding stags swifter than he was, much swifter of course, to begin with, but not in the long run: their wind was broken before he was exhausted, they spent themselves in one terrified rush after another, while he followed the trail in a steady, persistent trot. The moment was bound to come, even if it took days, when the deer could no longer rise when he came up to it with his hunting-knife. This stag, however, showed not the slightest sign of weariness, it galloped as swiftly every time he started it, and every time it seemed to have grown, to be gliding away ahead of him as though on air, a mighty royal stag with antlers that seemed rather to lift it and bear it than to weigh it down. And as the hunter did not give up—for he had never yet turned back without his quarry—the stag went on soaring ahead with the hunter on its trail, as though he had never done anything but hunt that stag and was never destined to do anything else.

At night he slept on the ground without a fire, with his head in his arms, speechless from fatigue, and every morning he felt less rested, when again he took up the trail and followed it till he had started the stag, to run after it throughout the day.

And as he ran the forest behaved strangely; it was summer when the hunt began, but when he looked about

him the trees were bare and he shivered with cold; and then again the woods were green and he was too hot, and this repeated itself he knew not how many times; but he did not let it trouble him.

At last the stag actually did stop. It was at night, for now the hunter was pursuing it in the dark as well as by day; it could not hide, for there was no more forest, they had come out into bare country beyond the inhabited world, a distant, gloomy region where skeletons of dead beasts were seen everywhere upon the ground, great piles of bones; it was evidently the place where all the beasts come when they go away to die. Over this ground the stag soared, and now it could be seen that it did not touch the earth in its flight; but the hunter himself had a sensation as though he was in the air and moved more by the power of his soul than by running.

The plain of the dead beasts ended in an immense cliff which extended on both sides as far as the eye could reach, and below the cliff yawned empty space, sheer black nothingness, the abyss or the place the night comes from; whatever it was, there was no going any farther. The stag stopped on the extreme brink of the abyss and stood against the sky in its full height with its mighty antlers raised, looking like a mountain, with its shoulder exposed. Now an arrow could reach it, and the hunter ground his teeth and shot.

Even while the arrow was in the air he saw the stag rise high above the earth and turn to fire; it galloped to the sky in a flash of flame, and as it mounted higher and higher its light waned and became a group of sparks, revolved once upon itself—and stood still in the firmament!

And then the hunter saw that what he had shot at, believing it to be a stag, was a constellation. He knew it

perfectly well, had always known it; seeing it made him feel a child again. But how cold he turned! The starry sky swung above him like a fearful wheel, and a jet of air from eternity struck him to the marrow. He perceived that he was at the world's end, and that it was Time itself he had been hunting. Then the awe of death came upon him.

His hunter's rage had left him, he remembered the mother and the child, turned and began to walk towards home.

A hundred years had passed when at last he came back to the place he had left. Light of foot, with a flying arrow to lead his yearning, he had run from home; he came back staff in hand and swaying like an old old man.

He found the place again where he had had his house, but it was greatly changed. There was the small knoll, but the wood was different, though apparently the same; there were only the rotten stumps left of the trees he had known, or nothing at all, and new ones which before had been young saplings in the undergrowth had become old trees. It was another forest; he was now a stranger in his own home.

The spring had dried up; a depression in the slope showed where it had been, to one who remembered it, but it had no water, it had run out long ago. Of the house with the carved posts in which the couple had had their nest and where fabulous beasts had crowed from the roof-beams, there was not the slightest trace—only a little grassy mound, like an old grave, showed the place. It was so still in the wood; the strange lofty trees raised their branches stiff and bare into the winter mist.

The old man sat down on the grave of his house and

gathered dead leaves about him as though for a bed. The nest was cold. He found small fragments of charcoal in the grass, the remains of a vanished hearth-fire; they were covered with rime and seemed to wound his hands. The wood was lifeless, it did not even harbour fear, for what had he more to fear?—only loneliness.

The hunter had grown old, but so great a longing did he feel for those he had lost, so near were they to him, though he was never, never to see them again, that he could not die. The memory of his loss could not die, for that was now the only thing he had left; it was stronger than time, and it craved a form.

He built himself a hut in the forest, and when he had as much shelter as a solitary old man needs he began to model in his mind, trying shapes in the air with his hands and familiarizing himself with visions he had; they were to become an image, he would carve an image, it was to be the two as they lived for ever in his soul. And around them as a centre he began to build a house in his mind for eternity, which was to show forth Life and Time, and the forest and the beasts, and the sun, and the underworld, everything that existed, and all that he had possessed and lost and still possessed in memory. Such was the house his craft would build, and in it the Mother and the Child should dwell, risen again and made immortal in an image.

With them he began, they were to be represented in one, two souls in one shape; he imagined the two as they used to sit under the trees, the mother holding her little son before her on her knee so that the whole forest should see him; and he would show how his hair had borrowed its gold from the sun, and how the old trees bowed down before him with their branches.

Alas! when he had finished there was a block of wood which bore the marks of tools and of much labour; there was indeed a hint of a human image in it, but it was neither the two as he saw them in his mind nor the image of them he had intended. It would have to be made over again, from the very beginning. But until he could accomplish that he set up the image in his hut and fed his soul on it, in the memory of the two never-forgotten ones and in the hope of the real and perfect image, of which this only served as a poor outline.

He often sat before it, as he had sat on the grass before the young mother and her child; he sang to it, while the forest outside roared powerfully above his hut, as he had sung to the two, when the forest roared over them and made them small.

In the spring he moved the image out into the open and played before it on a bark flute; it sounded like new-born babes in the woods. And the beasts, with whom the former hunter had made peace, came sniffing up at the sound and stood quite near the hermit to listen.

On one of these spring days, when he had been playing to his memories under the beeches and was in a rapture, his eyes closed.

The aged easily fall into a doze, and their slumbers are short. But one sleep is as long as another. The old hunter nodded; it might have been only an instant, or it might have been a thousand years. And in an enraptured absence such as this his being passed into Time.

II

THE FERRYMAN

ONCE more the oaks grew old after the hunter had dwelt by the river, and then another hermit settled there. Like the hunter he was nameless, but he was to acquire a surname by which he afterwards became known to all the world—Christophorus, the bearer of our Lord. He came from the country of the Goths and left his native land some time during the great Migrations and went out into the world, like so many others who were moving from North to South; but it was his fate to halt and to pursue his calling at a station half-way between the two.

From his birth Christophorus was of unusual stature, big beyond all measure and so strong that he had never reached the limit of his strength. But he was gentle, and that was fortunate, for otherwise he might have wrought mischief. No one had seen him angry; that was out of the question, there could be no occasion for it since nothing could avail to irritate him. Even while he was still serving the franklins he was never in a bad temper, as others might be when the cattle strayed or were unruly; if the oxen got out of hand he simply threw them with his bare hands and held them down till they were quiet again, and if a bull-calf was obstinate and would not be tethered he carried it home in his arms. It was said of him that he was slow, but a man with such mighty limbs cannot be expected to move them so quickly as the small

and irascible; he was in no hurry, since anyhow he could get more done than the rest.

At first, when he had just come from the woods, he was perfectly stupid and had to learn everything—how to eat from a bowl and bring the spoon out whole when he had shot the food into his mouth; but he never needed to be shown a thing twice.

He was not deficient in judgment; he thought over his position and had an eye for what suited him. For this reason he did not stay at the farm where he served. The man there, quite a good ordinary franklin, set him to clear waste land, and he pulled up trees by the roots, one in each hand, knocking the mould out of the roots, and went off with stones as big as houses; if he had kept on with it he might have cleared enough land for a whole earldom.

But the giant thought it more and more strange that he should serve a weakling, when it ought rather to have been the other way about. He took an opportunity of finding out whether the man considered any one his superior, and discovered that the good man was ready to bow down to several—people he called his gods, Odin, Thor, and a good many besides, some of whom moreover were females. From other sources also the giant got to know that small or middle-sized people liked to pretend to more strength than they possessed by referring to powerful allies they were supposed to have somewhere or other—beings who, however, as they themselves admitted, were invisible to the naked eye. This kind of thing the giant could not take seriously. He did not believe in spirits, not having met any yet, either by night or by day. Once when something stung him and he thought it might be a spirit, such as the others used to talk about if they felt any pain, he caught it between his finger and

thumb, but it turned out to be a sheep-tick. Since nothing in his experience pointed in the opposite direction the giant had come to believe exclusively in his own strength. If therefore he was to serve anybody and to be induced to remain in his service, it would have to be some one even mightier than himself.

Besides his gods the master spoke with reverence of the King, the mightiest of all franklins and an actually living person, not just a doubtful thing in the air; the giant's deliberations therefore led to his taking service with the King. However, he had not been there long before he found out that there were even greater kings than he in other realms; and thus it was that the giant went abroad, since his mind was made up that he would serve no lord but him who did not fear anybody or anything in the world.

Now we know from the legend of Christophorus, which is familiar to the whole of Christendom, that he left the mightiest of all kings because on an occasion this King made the sign of the Cross when the Devil was named. Christophorus asked him why he was writing with his finger in the air, and was told that he feared the Devil; and straightway the giant took his leave and entered the service of the Evil One.

But when one day the Prince of Darkness evinced a fear of the Cross and, when asked by the giant why he went out of his way to avoid what was nothing but two pieces of wood, had to confess that he feared him whose sign was a cross, the giant perceived that the Lord of the Cross was the strongest and went out into the world again to find him. As every one acquainted with the legend knows, he did not find the Kingdom of God immediately in so literal a sense as he was inclined to expect; but he was instructed

by a hermit, of whom he sought counsel, how in the meantime his deeds might prove acceptable to the mightiest of all Lords. Ordinary Christian exercises the giant rejected as unfitting for him; he would undertake neither fasting nor watching, and prayers were never on his lips, since he was a man of few words. But he was willing to take upon himself a stout piece of man's work, if our Lord would be pleased with that. And then the hermit had found a suitable occupation for him. It consisted in ferrying wayfarers over a great river which otherwise was difficult to cross: one of the aims of this Lord's rule was to bring people nearer to each other; here was a chance for a strong man. And thus it came about that the giant established himself on the river in question and became a ferryman.

Christophorus had now entered upon a service which was to his liking. Although he could not see the Lord he served nor knew where he was, which he felt to be something lacking, he took the word of the man of God for his existence and appreciation of the work that was carried out in his name. This work was sufficiently heavy and seemed to him useful. He preferred to struggle with the great river rather than, as he had done before, with troops of armed men; for in truth the giant had always loathed war, since by the nature of things he had always been left in peace by his fellow-men and was incapable of comprehending the reason of *their* mutual hostility, except in so far as it could be put down to their frailty. On account of their wickedness it seemed to be necessary for all men to go about with stabbing and cutting implements on them; for his part he preferred to be content with a staff to keep unruly people at a distance when they became numerous;

it had never given him any satisfaction to perforate or slice up the bodies even of wicked persons.

To conquer the elements, on the other hand, not on some single famous occasion but every day, unnoticed, merely for the sake of doing it, as fishers and husbandmen contend with the weather, was better suited to his inclination. Just as intangible things, emulation and verbosity, all kinds of wordiness, were foreign to this man's nature, so did he abhor renown. With whom should he seek favour? He travelled when there was a reason, but preferred quiet; it did him good to stay in one place, now that he had found employment, while in return the world passed by him from day to day and from year to year.

The river was always on a journey; it came in a great flowing sweep from the forests and the highlands on one side and swung in a broad and mighty curve into the forests and out of sight towards the lowlands and the sea on the other side. Currents and waves dashed together like a procession of wild bulls; whirlpools and great smooth floors of water, which mirrored the sky and the endless woods, passed silently round points of land; the osprey hung over the eddies and dropped like a plummet upon the salmon which shot like lightning in the depths.

In springtime the river was swollen with the thaw on the distant mountains and flooded the woods, plunging thick and muddy and full of green ice that had fallen from the glaciers about its source, and uprooted trees that floated out from the submerged forest; then it was hard to cross and Christophorus had need of all his strength, both when he waded over with a single traveller on his back and when he had more passengers and had to use the ferry-boat.

It was a clumsy great log-boat or raft, which the giant himself had built, mainly with an eye to durability; an

uglier craft was not to be found, it looked as if the giant had used his teeth in building it, and so he had. The pole he used was equally unadorned, a tree whose branches he had scraped off. But both answered their purpose. Christophorus used to push the ferry-boat before him into the current while he himself walked behind on the bottom, and if ice or big trees drifted down upon the ferry he pushed them out of the way with his staff.

But if the teeming river was thus always on a journey—not to mention all the traffic of fishers and traders who went up and down it—there was likewise an endless stream of people travelling across it, for the ferry lay just at that point of its course where it cut the great highways upon which the Migrations had now been moving for centuries on the way from North to South, and on which they continued to pass in ever greater numbers; at first scouts and a few scattered bodies of men in ages long past, now whole tribes and hosts at once. It was like a cross-road of the ages, where the course of nature met that of men, one athwart the other.

The river travelled on, and the people travelled on, but Christophorus stayed on the ferry and carried them over. He came to love the place; if he did not understand the symbol of the Cross, he lived and worked after his fashion in the very midst of it, at a cross of which one arm was actually drawn by the inexhaustible sources of nature and the other by the wandering of mankind.

While he dwelt here in the name of a God unknown to him he assisted half the North across the river, one troop after another of Northern peasants on their journey towards the South. They came in families and clans, often the whole population of a district, who had quitted their homes with household goods and cattle, old and young, women

and children, each one having a responsibility within the troop, like the ants; from rude warriors who grunted after a murder as if it was a joke and wiped their bloody swords between two fingers, to little girls carrying in their arms the puppies that had been entrusted to them. They came, one swarm, one tidal wave after another, whatever they might call themselves or come to be called later when they had founded kingdoms in the South and made themselves famous; big ruddy peasants all of them, like Christophorus himself and of the same blood, the same hairy freckled folk with eyes blue as the sea, whether they came from the dense inland forests, from the river countries of the Baltic, from its islands, or from the long harsh shores of the North Sea; and they all travelled with the same object, that which had sent as many more of them by the sea way in ships—*they* came overland, for every road must be tried—to get away from the cold marshes of the homeland, away to the South, to the lands of legend and the sun.

III

KING SNOW

BAD harvests it was that had driven these husbandmen from their homes in the North, where they belonged. The winters were always severe, but still they could be endured, otherwise nobody would ever have lived in these countries. It was the winters that had made them what they were; they came of Carl's blood, steeled by adversity, and they could stand much; but even hardy folk will revolt when they think the limit has been reached.

The same Power that had formed the root of their being was still over them, but at a distance; in the farthest North lay the ice-sheet, and at times it seemed again to be stretching a cold arm over the countries where once it had been supreme; then the winters were lengthened and the brief summers were barely able to take the frost out of the ground; icebergs were seen in the North Sea, fog and mist hid the sun for half the year. Already these countries were scarcely dry after the great thawing of the ice, with a net of water, lakes and streams in the lowlands among the damp woods and morasses where the arable land was to be found; the earth held the cold under its surface, great floods from the winter sometimes lay through the whole summer, the cornfield became a lake, or the little corn there was never came to maturity.

But if only one of the brief summers failed, it meant shortage in the winter; the crop did not go very far even in good years, and if several bad years succeeded one

another there was famine, no corn at all and but little meat, since the cattle could not be kept alive either if the crops failed; the only thing left was hunting, and for that there were too many. That was it, they were too many, another burden; the homesteads overflowed with children who seemed in a moment to become great, greedy swarms; what was to be done with them in time of famine?

King Snow rules in the countries on both sides of the Cattegat; he comes in a seven days' snowstorm and fills the sky, turns night into a grave, and day into a driving twilight with no bounds between morning and evening; the air is snow, the storm is snow and seems to come from every quarter at once, snow pours out of the sky, and snow stands in vertical showers straight up in the air, the earth is buried, snow begets snow and whirls together into drifts, the whole world is like a white fire, but with a disastrous darkness at bottom, and cold; death is in the air. Men turn pale from looking out into the whirling gloom, an all-powerful breathing can be felt, they think they can see him soaring on limbs of the storm, see how the snow comes from under his wings—Odin, King Snow, is abroad!

And when he has finished his game and sends a calm the lands lie buried under snow, snow half-way up the stems in the woods, the earth everywhere hidden, a single white snowfield as far as the land extends, white shores along the Cattegat, white over in Skoane, on both sides of the Sound, Kullen looking like a headland of snow running out into the sea, the isles like isles of snow; and between all the buried coast-lines the sea open and black, reeking with frost, like gall; until the sounds too are closed with ice a fathom thick and the snow smooths out all the countries in one.

The fisherman who is accustomed to sail has to go on

his feet and do miner's work with an axe to get down to his water. In the black nights the ice roars from bank to bank, a vast submarine discharge of force; and men in their beds of skins under the ground and under the snow hear the booming and crawl deeper into their skins; it is the sea arching its back under the floor of ice and lifting it; but the sea is bound, and in the echoes from shore to shore Odin laughs with scorn.

The ice stayed till late in the summer, and it was a rainy summer; sometimes the Sound was still full of old ice-floes when autumn and a fresh frost arrived. In such years there was nothing in the cornfields, the cattle grew lean, and hunger began to drive people out of their villages with long hollow cheeks—there would have to be a change.

On the part of the leaders, the chiefs, the wise men who intervened between the people and the Powers, everything was done to get the bad years to stop. There were sacrifices without stint; first they offered cattle and more than they could spare, and when that did no good they offered men, thralls or prisoners they took and hanged up in the wind for the Wanderer, since he seemed to be gruesome enough to demand it; the summer was just as bad.

In one of the districts they then resolved on an unusual thing; here the king and priest himself was sacrificed, as expiator for all the rest, and at the same time the sacrifice was addressed directly to Odin as the Lord of Fire, for it was in that capacity he failed them. And possibly he had been neglected in this way; latterly people had gradually abandoned the funeral pyre and had been giving their dead to the earth in mounds; perhaps the Lord of Fire had felt aggrieved at being deprived of his due. Now they would try to make amends, and if any one was to be sent

to him through the fire, the best ought not to be too good. The king himself raised no objection to the decision.

The sacrifice was appointed for the day of the midwinter solstice, as being the solemnity to which the ancients attributed the most importance, and many old customs that had dropped out of use were dug up again for the occasion, in case there might still be some power in them. The need-fire was kindled with great ceremony after all fires had been extinguished on the hearths, so as to have fresh fire and to give the Powers an example for imitation as concerned the heavenly bodies; many other things were tried which some perhaps only half believed in, but if the world, with the wisdom they possessed, was in danger of collapsing, they could only go back and do over again what the ancients had done to keep the universe going.

The solemnity took place on rising ground within the forest, the oldest sanctified place of sacrifice, whose stones had not been moved since the people took possession of the country, and some of the oldest men with long memories were chosen to perform it. Almost the whole population of the district, all the clans, had collected, women of course excluded; all the men were there, the whole host, for they were all under arms; not that they were summoned to war, but the day was a solemn one. Armed franklins on horseback and on foot were mustered about the sacrificial mound and far into the woods.

The invocation of fire was performed in the dark winter morning before sunrise, at the right moment when the sun might be expected, and it was accompanied by all the proper forms. The initiates made fire by friction, and meanwhile the sacrificial animals were slaughtered. They were not good to look upon, the shaggy, bony beasts they had; the blunt men who led them forward were short-

spoken and looked as though they thought the cattle might have been better if certain masters had taken more thought for their grazing. When they had a flame and the new fire began to blaze the whole host set itself in motion at a signal sounded by lurs; the lurs brayed sharply in the cold forest, a harsh and joyless blast, and then came the tramp of the host; levy after levy marched in battle-array up over the mound past the sacrificial pyre, in silence, but as though demanding to be called to witness; the mounted men came up troop after troop on lean horses and dipped their lances to the fire, all in silence; only their tramp could be heard, and the dark troops were seen ascending the mound as though the earth brought them forth, one wave after another.

When all had thus appeared before the fire the king was sacrificed. He came forward of himself into the glare of the fire, swelling with contempt, and offered his forehead; he received the blow in the middle of his wrinkled brow and fell backwards into the fire. At the same instant all the men struck their shields with their drawn swords, in a single clash, and a shout of homage rose from the whole army at once, a war-cry from a thousand throats that sounded in the forest like a supernaturally loud roar from some beast of prey.

While the act, which moved them all to wrath, was in progress, silence fell again, and in the stillness, only broken by the beating of the flames from the pyre, the old franklin who presided over the sacrifice stood forth and recited the hymn of the day:

> Now mounts the sun
> with brightest beams,
> and Balder's bane

goes down in blood.
Hope has returned
to sea and sky.
See and behold!
Fair is the day!

Allfather promised
this to our fathers:
That the lean years
linger not with us.
Patient the greybeard
suffers the hardships
of wildest winters—
the sun shall return!

Chary of gold
were the Northern Gods,
but they gave yearly
a new-made sun.
Thus the Preserver
is Lord of the slain;
often the noble
went to the pyre.

Praying, the peasant
sows corn on the land;
chary of seed
ne'er reaped a crop.
Fair wind for mead,
and rain for malt!
Only the fool
gives without getting.

Midwinter's moon
gapes like Hel's mouth.
In a sack of darkness
the sun turns again.
Cheerless sing
the children of earth;

Father of fire,
accept our offering!

But the sun did not show itself. It was a cloudy morning with a closed sky, the daylight had no power, and it snowed as the host broke up and returned home. Sacrificial banquet there was none, nobody had the heart to eat. Before evening the embers were cold and all traces of the offering were buried beneath deep snow on the ancient place of sacrifice in the woods.

Through the following summer they waited the result, but when again it brought no crop they saw that it was useless any longer to expect the Powers to keep the covenant, and so they denounced it on their side. The gods of the weather were given no more offerings, Frey's altars were bare. And when spring came again and brought no kindness, they denounced the country and its spirits, broke down the posts of their high seats, stamped out the hearth and sought other shores.

Many had already begun to doubt the power of the Powers—did any such exist at all? As for the sun, it turned whether you played tricks with fire for it or not, but it never came any nearer. You had to go nearer to it. Starved and pretty well godless they turned their backs upon a world that had grown old, ripe now to be filled with a new one.

IV

THE LONGOBARDS

THE country was not entirely depopulated, it was only the able-bodied men who left, the younger ones with their women-folk and whatever else they wanted to take; there remained behind the oldest and the youngest, who were not fitted for new and adventurous undertakings. The country became quieter when the host was gone, nothing happened, the homesteads were extinguished; it was as though the men had taken Time with them.

Before the departure there had been disagreements as to who should quit the country. For a while the warriors considered that the best way of remedying the distress was to reduce the surplus population; the aged and infirm might let themselves be buried, and the superfluous children should be exposed; the remainder could then live in the country, even without gods. This counsel was opposed by the aged and the children, supported by their mothers, who advised the younger people to emigrate, and this advice was adopted. The host that emigrated and afterwards became famous was called the Longobards, from the long-handled axes the men carried.

The axe reflected their destiny: originally it was a forester's axe with which they felled trees and cleared land; afterwards it also served as a carpenter's axe, good for shipbuilding and the work of a wheelwright; but first and last it was a weapon, and it became one more and more.

They marched overland to the coast, built themselves

ships and became seafarers, went ashore on other coasts and became husbandmen again, built ships once more and committed themselves to the sea; until they landed on the south shore of the Baltic whence the great trade routes ran inland into Europe, and then they pushed towards the South overland, lost their seafaring ways and became a caravan folk that trusted in the rolling wheel. It was not exactly a rapid-whirling wheel, but had its ups and downs, a creaking, laborious wheel, but it carried them on. The journey was a slow one; the young generation that had left home with the thought of reaching the goal next day passed on this goal to a new one and stayed behind in the mounds that marked their track; in the end the journey was inherited through so many generations that its origin was almost forgotten and its purpose no longer remained the same.

Travelling, for an army which becomes a nation on the route, takes time and does not always pass in peaceable fashion; wherever you come there are other people in the world whom you have to make terms with or cut through, a life of difficulties; you have to live, and must stop in every place at least long enough for a crop to ripen, if you have a chance of sowing one; in winter no travelling can be done. Sometimes they stayed on, for a century or so, in some place where the pasture was good and the surrounding people amenable, and a number of them settled there for good, since land was what they came for, becoming absorbed in the population and using the axe again for clearing.

But soon there would be too many of them again; another army was formed which built itself waggons; the long slender axes turned their edge to the South, hope had burst forth again, they were on the march!

And it was while they were thus on the march from one station to another that they struck the ferry where Christophorus lay and were assisted by him across the river.

They announced their coming as so many had done before them; Christophorus knew them a long way off by the din they raised in the quiet woods, a bellowing of cattle and shouts as at a fair, a sound of neighing that dashed along with the horsemen at full gallop; and when the column drew nearer it resolved itself into the roaring and crashing of a thousand throats and many thousand hoofs, while a cloud of dust rose above the tree-tops even before the swarm could be seen; then the first mounted outposts swung out of the wood on the other side of the river, stood still and began to wave and blow their cow's horns lustily to attract the ferryman's attention.

After them the first waggons came in sight—big, clumsily built covered carts in which women and children and whatever else the column carried with it were conveyed; round about them rode the armed warriors. The waggons were regular castles, and when a halt was called they were drawn up in a circle and became a fortress within which the army encamped; on the march they swayed over the trackless turf and creaked loudly with their huge wheels, which were made in one piece like the sun and turned as majestically.

The woods flashed with axes and long spears round the waggons and their stooping horned teams. Behind them came the herd, immense motley crowds of cattle kept together by the thralls; and round about the whole procession swarmed the young people, freckled overgrown striplings who found something to do everywhere, girls who preferred walking to sitting in the waggons; straight, big-limbed young women of seventeen with bare legs under a hempen

skirt and honey-yellow hair like sunshine about their shoulders.

In the open fore part of the carts sat the matrons with spindles in their hands, and children big and small with gleaming hair, almost white like that of the aged, looked out over them and beside them, with the world showing in their clear, wide-open, childish eyes. From the back of the waggons projected house-timbers with scarfed ends; they had been taken down at their old home and were to be set up again when they found a new one; the plough, with mould from their old fields still on its board, showed its worn handles sticking out of the cart. But from the hindmost of all came smoke; here sat aged women with their wrinkles full of soot, tending a fire which was not allowed to go out; in the evening when the column camped each housewife fetched a brand from it for her open-air kitchen.

All the waggons were decorated with green boughs, for it was springtime. The woods had just burst into leaf and the travellers had just taken the road; like green woods on wheels the waggons went through the greenwood, like singing waggons, for song came from them, chirping voices of children, like a chorus of birds, and the young girls walked beside them singing, their souls felt so new, the woods were new, the world, the sun was new; the green young lads sang, with voices as rough and rusty as they could make them, and many a stern warrior leaned back as he sat his horse and sang up to the leaves, the song he had sung as a boy coming back to his throat. The matrons too sang as they span, rocking their heads gently, and their voices could scarcely be heard; the same tones that lured the young into a world they did not know turned them inward and backward to a memory. Here and there an old man, toiling beside the waggon, setting his shoulder to it

when it leaned and yelling and struggling with the thick-skulled oxen, had time to join in between the cuts of his whip, a growling hum that exposed blackened teeth, but his face grew brighter for it. It was the song of the wanderers:

Springtime sweet and green
Again on earth is seen.
The sun shoots beams aflare,
Mild is the air.
Southern wind,
Roaming mind!
Take up the staff, bring out the cart!
Come out, come out and let us start,
With creaking wheel and glad at heart—
To a far country!

The winter, weary jade,
Within her stall was stayed
Now she has foaled!
'Mid cobwebs by the cold—
Foal's foot,
Flying foot!
Up, lusty lads, mount and away!
Gallop in troop the livelong day,
As up and down your bodies sway—
To a far country!

And wilt thou go with me?
Till death I'll go with thee!
My fair young life,
My roving wife!
Girl and boy,
Lovers' joy!
Two together, day and night,
Double breathing, one delight!
Behind the dark, before the light—
To a far country!

The greenwood's freest glade
Invites us to its shade.
We know not where we go—
Swallows will show.
Swallow's wing,
Winds of spring!
Follow the springtime's call so free,
Southward, where the sun we see,
Follow, no bird so free as we—
To a far country!

The chorus filled the forest with one great, joyful human cry. And the children stretched their necks out of the waggons, like flowers turning their faces to the sun; their young skin caught up the spring and the breeze from the forest like the first breath of morning in the world. Never before or after was the day so great a marvel. As they looked the woods opened out and the river swung into view as a new almighty wonder, a vast being in motion which lay about the world in a curve and flowed, bearing suns in its mirror and mingled with the sky in the distance. But just opposite were the woods again, on the other bank, swelling in their pride, like another entrance to another new world. Here was the ferry.

And here was hard work for the grown-ups and for the ferryman, work for many days. The waggons had to be taken across one by one, then the horses and men, and lastly all the cattle, a few at a time, as many as the ferry-boat would hold.

But when after much trouble the people had been taken across, and their leader, the man with the fate of the whole tribe in his fierce blue eyes, came forward with a pair of scales and a strip of silver to cut off the ferryman's fee, Christophorus shook his head and would take no payment.

The chief dropped his hand with the scales. What did he mean by that?

Christophorus then gave him to understand that he was not a ferryman on his own account, but had been put there to assist people over the river for nothing, in God's name.

Oh, that was the way of it. Then *which* god was it that the fare was due to?

Christophorus pointed with his thumb to the cross he had planted above his hut, and had to explain to the stranger that he did men a service in the name of the great King Christ; however, King Christ did not desire any reward either; out of friendship for men he had appointed people to act thus on his behalf.

The chief, a young man with wild eyes and red hair already tinged with grey, could not make him out. Travelling with his people in a continual state of war and accustomed either to take or to pay for what he required, he had never yet encountered anything but opposition on his way—murder, blood and treachery wherever he went. Here for the first time he came upon a gentler custom, and it startled him; he went on, saving his silver, but could not understand it. And yet he was here at the boundary between the world he had left and the one he was entering. King Christ he would not forget.

Christophorus heard the column receding into the forests as it resumed its journey, the creaking waggons, the cattle and the loud, impetuous voices of the horsemen; they had now got their direction, the Alps awaited them; now they could try to cross them and see what they would find on the other side!

Christophorus shook his head and muttered in his beard: full of joy they travelled now, walking the earth as though they were the first and only men; the difficulties that had

driven them out of their homes were forgotten and they saw the whole future in sunshine. But when these same strapping young women one day were reduced to cutting their children's and one another's throats, after their men, the invincible, had been defeated in battle, then it would be a different song; no one who had heard it would lightly forget that howl of a camp when a nation perishes; no, no, and the old man shook his head again and again. Or suppose they were successful, the young warriors whose eyes shone with bloodshed and rapine, then they would become princes, their leader a king and their clans the nobility of the countries they would possess; but still they would have to pay the price in fratricide, in centuries of treachery and violence, for power is dear and devours the soul, as it devours the race; such is the effect of power, but who has ever said "No" when it was offered him? When did one ever hear of husbandmen who stayed on the soil? Christophorus talked to himself as to a whole congregation and admitted the truth of what he said, nodding and nodding again: ay, ay, ay, thus they had chosen their destiny. To travel and get rich, richer than their gaping minds could grasp, make nations subject to themselves, destroy and breed! Women! A kind of radiance and sweet perfume hung about the ferry after all the womanhood that had passed over; the old man blew and cleared his nose suspiciously—phew, new-married people, those Longobards! Couple after couple, hand in hand all of them! Their song echoed like a single great bridal chorus in a distant wooded valley—behind the dark, before the light! Ah yes, young people wear madness like a garland of light on their brows so long as they desire one another; afterwards they call the world to witness their torments in loud, offended birthplaints—ay, ay, ay, thus Life would live and

multiply and die, thought the numbed old ferryman and saint, shaking his head in his celibate wisdom, cooled down by much water—but it has to be ferried across.

His own work was not finished; other swarms would come and want to cross. Christophorus continued to ferry people from the North over the river on their way to the South until it seemed that he had emptied all the countries up where he himself had come from, and sent them down towards the sun and the warmth; and to all of them he gave the lesson of an unselfish deed performed for the good of all. None of the fresh and vigorous nations he ferried over to the South ever came back.

But when Christophorus had stayed long enough by the river it was given to him to ferry the Christ Child in the opposite direction, to the North.

For a long long time he had served the strongest of all Lords without ever seeing him. But hope worked within him and desired to leave a trace; he began to build, having leisure enough from his ferrying, and what he built was to be a house for King Christ to lodge in, if he should ever vouchsafe him a visit. To his own house Christophorus could not invite him; it was half a hole in the ground, half a hut of faggots; something more was wanted. Not unpractised in carrying stones, Christophorus then collected all he could find and began to pile them one on another into a building. The ground-plan was a cross, as was befitting, and the walls took up almost more room than the space they enclosed, for they were to be durable; the sun and moon shone through, for the giant was no mason, but the whole bulk held well together, looking like a little mountain. How the building was to be finished off and roofed over had not yet been settled, it was not nearly high

enough, Christophorus had thoughts of reaching the stars; at night when his cyclopean masonry towered up above the trees it seemed to him that the top was already quite near the moon.

The building never got any further, for in the meantime Christophorus really had a visit from his Lord. It happened very differently from his imaginings, as everybody knows from the legend. One evening he heard a child crying by the river and asking to be ferried across, but saw nothing when he went out; and this was repeated three times. The third time he became aware of a little male child standing on the river bank and imploring to be carried over the stream.

Christophorus then carried him over, but now for the first time found a burden which almost exceeded his powers. This little child was a marvellous child, it grew heavier and heavier, and the river swelled beneath him, the darkness closed before him and became doubly dark, it was as though the elements would swallow him. The child weighed him down, never had anything been so heavy. Such is the weight of Life's germ, Life's beginning and the time to come of which we have no knowledge. And yet it seemed that the burden itself sustained him, else he would never have come across without straining himself. When at last he reached the opposite bank it was as though he had carried the whole world upon his shoulders.

The Child looked upon Christophorus with a strange earnestness. "Let it not surprise thee," he said, "that I am so heavy. Know that thou hast not only carried the world upon thy shoulders but even Him who created the world. Behold, I am Christ thy King, whom until this day thou hast served in thy good work. And this shall be a sign unto thee: Strike thy staff into the ground. To-morrow

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it shall blossom and bear fruit." And when Christophorus awoke early next morning his pilgrim's and ferryman's staff had become a palm. Thus the South came to him.

He himself carried it into the North. But this belongs to another story, how the Kingdom of God penetrated northward and was received in the poor, harsh countries which had thrust out their young men, the stem, and which had only the roots and the young shoots left.

V

OUR LADY

WHEN again the age of an oak had gone by since Christophorus had dwelt by the river, a city stood there.

The forest no longer existed; from the ferry as far as the eye could see was open, cultivated land; the woods began a long way off on either hand and on the other side of the river. The ferry had attracted all kinds of people, fairs had been held there, and then it became a town; the surrounding land was cleared by settlers and came under the plough. On every market-day the peasants now came in from the country with their produce and in exchange received from the town the things brought by vessels from many parts of the world, which found shelter under its walls; thus a city is made, no one remembering that it has ever been otherwise.

The city did not extend far, its height was almost greater than its breadth, it looked like a cake of houses with a thick crust about it, the walls with their roofs and towers running all the way round; on the river side the town wall plunged abruptly into deep water, and on the other sides the river was led into a moat; a hoisted drawbridge gaped like open jaws with a roof of beams on the land side; here he who would reach the city had to swim, and be bitten if he came across. Within the walls the city lay closely packed, with steeply rising houses and many deep and twisting alleys between; the people went about at the bottom

of a gutter and lived in many layers above one another.

But in the midst of the city rose the church hill, and on its summit rode the Cathedral, Our Lady's, like a mountain made by hands with peaks and carved-out flanks. It was so big that the shadows of clouds in the sky flecked it like a mountain as they glided over it; it lay here in sunshine and there in shadow with its forest of spires, flying buttresses, garlands of stone, ornamental cornices and thousand figures; at night it rose out of the earth as a mighty body with its foot in the gloom and its airy open towers up in the starry sky irradiated by the moon.

The city beneath it was full of all kinds of everyday life: a bustling in the houses and the alleys, a rumbling on the drawbridge of peasants' carts when they were allowed to enter, hammer-blows from the cordwainer's shop where sole-leather was being beaten on the stone, little children rolling about, tumbling and getting up again, old women emptying their pails to the pigs in the street, crossbowmen pacing the walls on guard with morions on their heads. The city was a fortress: the beat of drums was heard in its narrow lanes and in the market-place a troop of horsemen paraded disguised in blue-black steel from top to toe, each man a fortress with closed visor, his face concealed by bars and bolts, with spikes and scales all over him. Carronades thundered from the walls on occasion, and the ships lying off the town, with high curving poops, saluted astern with *their* pieces, barking a brief while.

But the Cathedral reduced all to silence when it chose. Throughout the day it slumbered, reposing in its glory and in its proximity to heaven, merely acompanying the hours with a chime of bells, clear melodies like a web of sound, a golden soliloquy of tones high in the air; in the morning it rang for sunrise with rousing, powerfully swelling strokes

of the great bell, and at evening the same bell rang down the sun, but then it had a lingering resonance and ended in a single stroke of the clapper, three times in succession, with a pause between, like the last affrighted sigh of the dying day.

But on high festivals or when great matters were to be announced or exorcised, war, fire or pestilence, the Cathedral spoke with all its bells, crying with immense brazen tongues till its towers and walls swayed and resounded to their very foundations, the hill and the whole city resounded, and the sky far and wide and the country and the river winding through it, all this quivered and expanded in music when the Cathedral began to speak. At last it seemed to rise and shake, it opened, not to the day but to Time, the bells swelled as in a tempest and increased in tone, one century after another was revealed, one abyss after another, the Cathedral roared, sweating sound with its whole body; it was the ages rising again and finding a voice, a mighty heart found utterance in it.

On this same spot the hunter had had his dwelling under the lofty trees on the knoll, deep in the forest solitude. On the river bank the otter had had its hiding-places, where afterwards the town walls came down into the water; the badger had had his hole on the hill, where lay the Cathedral crypt.

Instead of the lofty trees the Cathedral soared with its heaven-seeking spires; but at their accustomed height the rooks still flew in and out, filling the upper regions of the church with their resounding cries, in which the spirit of the great trees seemed to live again. Lower down, in cornices and niches behind the statues of holy men, doves brooded and cooed in the sunshine; they too had kept their

nests. And at the very top, where the spire stood dizzily against the clouds and seemed to be sailing with them, the falcon lived under the vane, choosing as ever the highest point and the widest view. So old was the church that grass grew on it here and there, high up in some rift where mould had collected, as on a mountain side; the grass too was seeking to return. Up in an angle of the cornice where the wind had swept dust into a little layer of soil, moistened by rain and manured by birds, a rowan shoot grew, a real green tree at a dizzy height on the wall, calling to mind the forest. But from the gutters and galleries all manner of monsters and goblins looked down; they had been turned to stone, and spouted rainwater or made hideous grimaces over the city and the country, impotence perpetuated. They were the dragons from the hunter's house that reappeared in stone, banning night and terror. In the high and gloomy belfry a ticking went on at regular intervals, the pendulum of the church clock measuring time, a tardy ghost of Time that once was young—the woodpecker of the forest.

The hunter's woodland house and his image of Ygdrasil, his heart, the mighty expansion of memory, had passed into the Church; the *Ship* that carried so many yearning men towards the South had become its nave; Christophorus' cyclopean walls exceeding all human measure had passed into it together with his fidelity. He himself stood by the door of the church in everlasting stone, with the Child on his shoulders and a tree in his hand, wading trustfully through the deep; for the old ferryman was the patron saint of the river city.

And on passing through the door one came into a vast and lofty space with subdued light and coloured shadows, apparently boundless, the high, narrow nave of the church,

supported by a forest of pillars. They stretched upward like bright and slender stems, one beside and behind the other, losing themselves in the background of pillars and arches and spreading out into vaults of stone ribs and foliage, high up where the air of the interior blended into a strange violet-blue smoke. Here was the rainbow wherever one turned, the high narrow windows through which the light came in every colour, deep blue gleams and sparkling green and red and yellow intermingled as when the sun penetrates the leafy roof of the forest. But there was more than light and colour; on looking closer it was figures not of this world that shone in a celestial eternity, crowned men and calm winged women that had come to rest here, and bright, many-coloured pictures. And at the end of the nave the light was refracted in a mighty checkered rose, a ring of colours that branched into quaint patterns as though all circles and orbits of the universe here ran together and came to rest in one sphere for all time; it was the sun's image depicted in and illumining creation, sunset and sunrise united for eternity.

Up on the piers and in the half-light of alcoves within the walls stood the images of dead princes and warriors and holy men who here continued their existence in stone long after they had become dust in the earth; they spoke in a mute language of the desire to live on in a form, even when the flesh had bowed submissively to mortality. Here they were in their graves, the sarcophagi in the chapels on the top of which princely couples lay at full length in stone, the dead captain with his sword on the coffin lid and old captured banners hanging above in the mist of incense; here they were too in the worn reliefs of tombstones in the floor, paintings black with age but with burning eyes that follow you wherever you go. Everywhere,

in the church's pictures and statues, in its stained-glass windows, in its inscriptions and symbols, spoke the voice of a vanished time which is so powerful, the voice of the dead who cannot die.

The beasts of the forest were assembled here and turned to stone that they might not perish: in the carved capitals, amid foliage and from corners murky with the dust of centuries they thrust out their wild visages, wolves and stags together, for here they had finally made peace; they lived in the conventional blazonings of shields and armorial bearings which treasured old hunting joys, spread eagles, wild boars, the raven and the lion rampant in flourishes; fabulous animals here lived in stone a life reality had never seen, the dragon, the hippogriff and the indomitable horse with a long twisted horn in the middle of its forehead. The horrors and spectres of Night, whose existence loses itself in the imagination, could be *seen* here; in the crypt was the Underworld, the bound serpent of Darkness supported the base of its central pillar.

High up in the apse of the choir above the altar, as though on the very wall of heaven, stood solitude and the sign of the Supreme Spirit, the sign one feels behind one's back, but whose sight is death, the Eye suspended in air.

The whole body of the church was like an enchanted forest. At the entrance stood the holy water in an ornamental marble basin; its water came from an ancient well under the foundations of the church, in pagan times a sacred spring.

The hunter was here, now become an obscure legendary figure whose head Time had encircled with the halo of transfiguration; he and the supernatural stag, the speedy, the unattainable, which transported him from the present to eternity.

His soul was in the body of the church, *echo*, the old voice of the forest which rolled among the pillars, in the corners, and haunted the vaulting, that was he. His soul and the soul of all was in the organ, the voice of the church coming from everywhere and nowhere; the very fabric swelled with it, the vaulting, the walls, the piers, the whole stone edifice made music, a soft coloured blast seemed to move within it, a many-coloured roaring, in which could be heard the voice of all the quarters of the heavens, and the deep tramp of the distant sea transmitting itself to the feet as well as to the ear, and the birds twittered in thin high notes, the beasts shrieked, or muttered in the bass, and whole hosts of human voices traversed the vault, clear children's voices, whole solid waves of purest melody, as though invisible flocks of maidens were soaring past in song, and a chorus of darkly brooding men still pondering in the grave over the brevity of life. The forester's long, clamouring night-songs when in fear of the moon, the hermit's simple piping in the first calm light evenings of spring, were here heard again. That which none can put into words, which speaks in the winds and the stars and the seasons and in our blood, that which yearns even when the dead are dead, this reverberated through the building in many tones and united into a single swelling note which was a breath of eternity.

And the fragrance within the smoke that spread, coloured like the Milky Way, as a heaven under the vaulting and dispersed a mist of distance and promise through the air—this was the heaven of all remembrance, the infinite inner world of our memory, the scent of all summers, the perfume of all memories, even memories of things we have never experienced, every secret thing the sun has fostered, from the time when the first fir tree scattered its brew of

resin and dropped its cones on the crocodile's back, and the first apple tree blossomed and gave off perfume and hung full of bees in the first garden of the first human pair.

On the altar, just above that spot in the grove where the hunter had his cairn and made fire-offerings to his Powers, in the midst of this marvel of stone, colour, music and fragrance, stood the image of the Mother of God, Our Lady.

She was raised above all corruptibility upon a throne of ivory, for which a hundred elephants had given their tusks, and it was supported by chased and richly gilt clouds; she was robed in the most precious silks, to which hundreds of thousands of silkworms had devoted their blind lives; on her head she wore a great diadem of precious stones, a petrification of the ruttish fires of the South; each stone of them had cost human life and had witnessed lechery, whereby they had become so hard and flashed so immodestly, but upon her head they were the crown of innocence.

In her arms she held the Son of God, from whose childish head three golden rays broke out in the semblance of sunshine; in his hand he played with an apple, the symbol of the origin of all fruit and all spheres. For the rest this Son of God was a boy like other boys, chubby-cheeked, with his fat little limbs in layers from exuberant health. God's Mother smiled upon him, the holy mother-smile that is Nature's most beautiful blooming, the young mother's mute reposing in the marvel that has befallen her.

Before the holy Virgin burned a lamp which had never been extinguished since the church was founded; it was an ancient flame, the cult that kept it alight was older than

the Church, it went back to old, forgotten fire-worshippers. Year in and year out it burned: in the daytime it stood in the midst of incense and the coloured twilight from the windows as an admonition of the night, a paled watch-light that had survived into the daytime; at night, when the Cathedral lay empty and still as a vast tomb, it burned like a yellow wheel in the midst of the immense darkness, like a spark left over from the day, a lonely drop of the eternal fire at the bottom of the well of the grave and of darkness.

Terrible was the church at night. Its fathomless space was full of darkness, region behind region of darkness; high up lingered a pale, ghostly, coloured gleam, like a lunar rainbow; and a long spectral ray descended and traced eyes on one of the piers, a hovering blind life in the midst of a world of darkness; but below on the floor of the church the gloom brooded all the blacker, with only the everlasting lamp deep down in its gulf like an eye surrounded by rings of mist. A strange coughing came from distant resonant corners, the body of the church sighing within itself, the night sinking deeper and deeper into itself. The organ was perfectly silent, with redoubled silence; but up under the hanging banners there was a noiseless fanning, and a fanning in the draught under the vaulting, a swiftly fleeting life, the beat of wings, and now and then a little black soul became visible in a moon-beam; bats flitting hither and thither on their little dragon's wings and feeling their way in rapid flight among the pillars and empty spaces of the church.

Far away and high up through many dividing walls and chambers a hooting screech was heard at intervals, the owl in the tower—but it kept outside, it was the church's dismal

voice over the city at night. Then the Cathedral beetled above the roofs like a mountain of darkness, clotted together with the night, and from the lofty intricate spaces of the belfry came the hooting of the owl, as though the tower itself was hooting and threatening far and wide with its terror of darkness.

Round the foot of the church brooded crosses and graves and darkness, shunned by all men; and no one who could avoid it would look into the churchyard; no, he shut his eye on that side and spied out his way as well as he could with the other. If any man had been shut up in the church and forced to spend the night there alone he would have died of fright or lost his wits, become a babbling idiot for the rest of his days; nay, the cries of the poor imprisoned maniac would have driven any one mad with terror who chanced to pass by and hear them. The figure of Death, with his bare bones and his horrid grinning teeth, lurked here in the dark corners of the buttresses, among the tombs, behind door gratings; and vaguely connected with the church at nighttime was the idea of the Being of the Abyss, the Evil One, the repulsive male creature with a tail that was thought to be red as glowing iron, stinking of pitch and equipped with all the powerful and loathsome arts that are not to be spoken of.

Only the servants of the church were fortified to visit the Powers of the church by night as by day; these skirted henchmen sang vigils by torchlight in the crypt at midnight; a gleam of fire crept up through openings in the wall level with the ground, and a subterranean chorus was heard; men knew it was the Mass, but thoughts of the underworld haunted them; even such were the cries of those buried alive in Hell, the bloody howls of wolves below, the mad shrieks of distracted souls!

And to such terrors they delivered up their dead. Within the chapels where the dead lay buried, and the alcoves of the walls, gloomy even by day, the gloom condensed at night into the outer darkness; many times buried were the dead here. A sound as of withered leaves arose in the stillness of night and lost itself like trackless footsteps in the draught between the piers, unaccountably; it was a shifting of the bones in a coffin, muffled by boards and walls, one more whispered sign of life and death from what was slowly sinking to pieces through the centuries in the interior of the sarcophagus.

But again the church clothed itself in daylight, in its uplifting power over the eye. Every day it was itself a day above the day. But on Sunday it possessed an added rejuvenation. From early morning Sunday, the Sun's day, could be felt in the air; it set its mark upon everything throughout the day and preserved a greater beauty than all the other days of the week until the evening. The rooks called more clearly and with more of the dawn in their notes on Sunday morning from the roof of the church, the doves cooed and cooed as though there were bursting buds to coo over, and the people came up to the church in crowds as though to a grand migration; for the bells rang with a younger and stronger peal that day, rang out their welcome and the joy of Heaven over town and country, which lay so still and had adorned themselves because it was the day of rest.

Then it was the old world back again: in the church was a song as of waking birds, and the censers before the altar poured out cloud after cloud as they swung to and fro in a dizzy joy: the birth of the day, the young newborn clouds that the dawn brings forth and the sun turns red, and a fragrance of eternal summer spread within the

church to its uttermost corners; not a beggar by the door outside of all but it brought him a message.

Up under the vaulting the smoke lay like the mist of fertility in a hothouse, and here, high up, could be descried as it were a web of swallows darting in and out; they had their nests at the very top among the ribs and scroll-work. But their faint *veet-veet* was not heard, for the organ rolled, clearer, vaster, fuller in its tone than on other days; it received the congregation as in an open embrace of sound. The church stood erect with its pillars and altars, Heaven was opened.

The organ pealed with full force, a choir of voices filled the church as though descending from the spheres:

Torches of the stars eternal
Burn before thy heart, O Mother,
Who hast freed the world's repining.

Round thy head the spheres of heaven,
In thy heart the living waters,
Wonder-working thou, God's Mother.

Depths of innocence we dream of,
Girt about with streams of gladness,
Well of goodness never empty!

Thou the one whose soul reposes
In itself; the world unheeding
Thou dost dwell in brightness, smiling.

As a tree from heaven moistened,
Clothed about with showers of summer,
Thou hast decked thee, green and gladdened.

Like the tree its dead leaves dropping
Thou hast bowed in deepest sorrow:
Dust is every creature's portion.

Thou wert stirring in Life's morning.
As a rose by dew made fresher
Breathes Love's spirit from its chalice.

Roses blaze. Their thorns are cruel.
By the bier of short-lived summer
Bleeds the berry, with thy weeping.

Trembling dost thou tread, but dauntless,
On Life's pathways, mild and bleeding;
Bounteous art thou, Woman, bounteous!

For in thee has Life his dwelling.
From within thy secret chamber
Comes thy Child's voice, small and tender.

Here thy precious one thou lavest
And with mother-sources stillest,
Lifting, putting down, and tending.

Here when midnight's hour approaches
Softly sounds thy tender prattle
To thy nursling, warm and bonny.

With a song like flowery music
Gently rockst thou him to slumber,
Golden in the light thy tresses.

Newly kindled burn Life's torches!
He is born whom earth's unhappy
Kneel to when the earth is trembling:

Boy who shall the earth inherit,
Seed of man and Godhead's larva,
Hope that shall the future colour!

Wrathful wreaks the world destruction,
Sees itself with fear and loathing—
In thy nest are all things new-made.

Brutish lust would fain betray thee;
Sex's miserable riddle
In thy blood is turned to mercy.

In thy trouble's fiery torment,
When the shock of Nature casts thee
To the dust—then life thou givest!

Full of grace again thou buddest
In a young and lovely daughter,
Horror to sweet smiles transforming.

Miscreant's hand which thought to ruin
Answerst thou with double bounty,
Woman born again in bearing!

This is thy revenge, thou pure one:
Double fruit where first a single
Blushed defenceless 'mid the branches.

As a wave of sunshine chases
Shadows from a golden cornfield,
Even so thou smilest, fair one.

What in all the realm of Nature
Is like beauty, beauteous Maiden,
Eyes' delight, thou shining marvel!

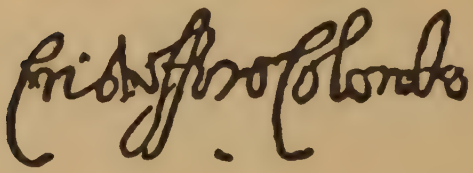
Sunshine's fire and blood's warm billows,
Secret laws of Life pursuing,
Hide within thy maiden bosom.

All Life's sweetness, warmth of gladness,
We may see upon thy visage,
Youth eternal thou, Our lady!

Source of goodness and forgiveness!
Virgin! Mother! Gentle Woman!
Joy with thee to find vouchsafe us!

BOOK TWO
THE CARAVEL

De muy pequeña edad entré en la mar navegando, é lo hé continuado hasta hoy. La mesma arte inclina á quien le prosigue á desear de saber los secretos deste munde.



I

THE "SANTA MARIA"

LIGHTS were shining at midnight from St. George's Church at Palos, in the south of Spain; a service was being held for the crews of three ships that were to sail at daybreak; it was the third of August 1492.

The little port was as excited as any town could be. The voyage which had been in preparation for the past few months was one that attracted attention, and Palos itself had a vital share in it, for the owners and most of the crews were local men, even if they were not making the voyage entirely of their own free will, both ships and ships' companies having been pressed into it by the Government. The leader, however, was a foreigner, an Italian from God knows where, who gained the ear of the great for his quite obviously insane plans, nothing more nor less than sailing to blazes, down underneath the earth—altogether a fairly eccentric business and one quite calculated to upset Palos, both that part of it which was going to sail and the friends and relations who were staying behind. Not many of the grown-up people went to bed that night; the seamen who were leaving, more or less voluntarily, armed themselves against an uncertain fate as reasonably as they could by fortifying visits to church and to the taverns.

In the church there was great solemnity, the whole of the crews went to confession and communicated; but even later in the course of the night many a sinner dropped in

again, when reminded by the bells, to repeat an *Ave* and cool his forehead against the stone pavement, until he felt drawn by the distant irresistible ring of goblets and stole out again. It was a difficult night, and many a worthy fellow swung like a pendulum between this world and the next.

Only one held out steadfastly in church to the last. This was the leader himself, Christopher Columbus. For hour after hour he knelt before the image of the Holy Virgin, with his huge and hairy skipper's hands clasped, himself an image of holy calm and self-communing, silent, with motionless features, weary with watching, absorbed in prayer and meditation. The glare of the candles fell upon the strong head with its reddish-grey mane and the strange blue eyes under eagle brows, which showed quite white against the flaming bright-red skin, weathered by a life in the open air, a picture of weather itself; the unusually tall and powerful frame reposed in itself, strength at rest. If this man was an adventurer he was in any case not one of the windy sort; there was a solidity about him as he knelt, his back and shoulders alone spoke for him, and many a roving eye seeking consolation in the sacred images of the church involuntarily came to rest upon him; it was well to be on good terms with Our Lady, but after all it was he who was to sail the ships! His lips moved like those of a man spelling out syllables, and the others nodded, nodded, mumbling to themselves; if only there might be power in his prayers—for if *he* were not in grace what would become of the rest?

What the Admiral felt, what was working in his soul, could not be read in his face. There was something hot about his eyes; but then it was warm in the church, the air in the confined space was thick with incense and the mawkish smoke of the candles, whose little flames had coloured

rings like eyes that had watched overlong. The church was too crowded, the air like a hothouse or a lying-in room, saturated with music and incense; the priests said mass and rang the altar bell, and the bells in the tower outside made the walls vibrate, the organ blared again and again, the Mass rose as in a wave culminating in loudly enunciated Latin conjurations, the holy images stared as though through a veil—and still Columbus was on his knees before the Virgin Mary's altar. The felted doors at the entrance to the church fell to now and then and let in air as the crews came and went; already a bluish gleam of daylight made its way in each time the door opened, day was breaking; even the priests yawned behind their hands and blinked their red and dried-up eyes. The body of the church stood out of the darkness, as though built up of dust and cobwebs, piers and walls came into being in a light from outside, and the candles grew dim, a wan meeting of day and night. The sailor who had hovered backwards and forwards so often in the course of the night fell asleep in the middle of an *Ave* and a hiccup, and woke again on hitting his forehead against the stone floor, with a groan; well, he would live or die, one or the other!

But a cold breath swept through the dawn outside, and a rich muddy smell arose from the river, hulls and masts came out of the darkness, the three ships lay ready for sea with sails half unfurled; their lights were extinguished, no longer wanted, and the ships' boats pulled to and fro in the stream between ship and shore, taking the last things on board.

In a tavern by the harbour some of the crew were swinging a final tankard and taking a last leave of their friends. Here the brothers Pinzon, who commanded two of the

ships, collected a crowd about them and rehearsed once more the whole plan of this more than doubtful expedition. They were conscious of the attention they attracted, but not proud; on the other hand, of course, they had all the information and talked quietly like men who knew, so that every one had to crowd round to hear them; as men of experience and local men they spoke with weight. Martin Alonzo as the elder gave his opinion first, after him Vincente Yannez, who entirely agreed, but could put it in even stronger terms; everything that was obvious was said again and again. There was only one thing on which the brothers would express no opinion but kept their mouths tight-shut, and that was the possible outcome of the voyage. Martin Alonzo held his peace, and Vincente held his, but both were bursting with what was unsaid; and Martin Alonzo, standing in a noble attitude with his weight on one leg and the other advanced, shrugged his shoulders, buried his head in them as though bending to the elements, and showed both his palms—*Quien sabe?* And Vincente arched his back, and he too showed both palms—*Quien sabe?* The brothers wore sea boots reaching to the hips, for they might have a good deal to go through, but the upper part of their bodies was cased in iron, cuirass and helmet, with visor up; but in a little while they clapped it down, and then they were bolted and barred, ready to meet legions of unknown monsters and man-eaters.

It was a great rambling tavern with murky corners, and heads were not very clear; nobody knew exactly what was going on here and there in the background, female voices could be heard amid the clash of tankards, stringed instruments, singing and a rhythmical clapping of all hands in unison like a great raging heart, and above all their heads was a waving, sparkling, bewitching vision—for they had

got a girl up on the table, where she was dancing a perilous dance on the very edge; so the Moors hadn't taken away all the dancing with them when they were chased out of Spain the other day, here was a creature as supple as if she had a bow for a backbone, with a stomach like an eel; and there was somebody who knew how to manipulate the flute with few holes and many repetitions. Rather African it was, the dance; the eel wriggled tenaciously on the table, she gave vent to a screech, and keeping her feet on the same spot she let herself go in a presto, the men yelled, *Brava!* and wall and ceiling showed the shadow of the dancer with raised arms and twisting hips, heeling over at the waist; she whinnied like a mare, the guitar-player stormed at his strings, the nasal trills of the flute came quicker and quicker, the audience stamped their feet as well as clapping, the castanets clattered, spurring her on, a teeth-chattering race, no longer an occasional shout but shouting all the time . . . for to-morrow they were to die, but *now, now* they had everything that life could give!

Yes, it had been a wild day in Palos—some of the men were hopping on one leg, the other lamed; others only saw with one eye and had a bloody bandage over its fellow—for this mad evening had begun with *letting the bull loose!* Of course, in a little place like Palos there was no bull-ring, but then they had a town bull and knew how to amuse themselves! Bull loose in the street! Hey! Jesus! Look at the bull, all by himself in the market-place, all powerful, waving his tail—and everybody scampering indoors and upstairs, headlong, on all fours—look at the bull trotting down the middle of the street with horns raised, quite alone, and all the doors are slammed, and a pair of heels vanish over a paling—hey, the whole street swept clean as if by magic, people hanging out of

trap-doors and garrets to look on . . . and now the bull-ring is ready, it has arranged itself, out of the houses jump nimble young fellows and begin to tease the bull with their capes, horsemen dash into the street leaning over their mounts as they gallop round a corner, with long lances in rest; collision, crash, a cloud of dust and horses' legs in the air, riders on top of one another, a torrent of blood; the bull has got his horns into the first horse, the street yells, and now it's a mix-up, cracks, falls and hurly-burly, a hunt down the steet and back again, till the bull is ready for the death-stroke—then the signal is given and all draw back, except one, a young desperado; he and the bull are left, absolutely alone, face to face in the middle of the street. He has no other weapon but a naked blade, like a spit, with a cloth wrapped round the end he holds. The killing is done in breathless silence. The raging beast, all body and horns, with a bloody gleam in his eye, and the slender, mortally determined man, the lurking spit . . . and then in a moment the street roars and becomes alive with the things people madly fling from windows and cocklofts, hats, clothes, flower-pots, some swing themselves down into the street—for he has done it, the spit lies buried in the bull's shoulder with the point in its heart, it collapses as if struck by lightning!

And now the desperado is sitting here in the tavern on a chair, nodding with his chin on his chest, drunk and sober and drunk again many times that day, sated with honour, worn-out, aged by a generation in a few hours . . . and to-morrow, no, *now*, *now* he is to sail; outside is the dawn, looking with a grey face upon the desperado and the dancer.

A person nobody paid any particular attention to moved

about among the groups in the course of the night, now here, now there, chattering incessantly without any one grasping the connection of what he was saying, not that that mattered; now and then he gave vent to a burst of laughter which made people turn round to see what the joke was; but it was nothing, only that mountebank, the Babuino as they called him, who had once again said something he himself thought intensely amusing.

He was a little swarthy man with a big face, mauve about the mouth, and he looked like an old huckster; he had put in an appearance here to peddle his wares and had in fact done very good business among the seamen who were about to sail and were providing themselves for a long voyage. He was in a mad mood to-night, the Babuino, pretending to be drunk as nobody was sober, declaiming in a loud voice, putting on the airs of a Dionysus, and giving great lurches when he crossed the room; but he was only lame, not a drop of wine had passed his lips. He went up to one or another with his goods, sideways like a crab, with a confidential wagging, all grins and good nature; he stooped down, made himself still smaller than he was, a miserable thing, a dog in every respect, except his eyes, which shone like magic orbs, with a perfectly frank look of impudence, which, however, those present were too thick-skinned or too drunk to notice. When anybody made fun of the Babuino, or tried to shake him off with a threatening gesture, he retreated a step with quivering face, timorous, dazed, and his eyes disappeared altogether; he was then a sufferer, thrust out, infirm and palsied, into a cruel world; but at the same moment his lips drew back from his teeth, it was best to be on guard—only a grimace, and then he grinned again and crept near, fawning, almost lying on the ground, his limbs still quaking with fear, enough to move

a stone, and in his forepaw he disclosed something that you had to look at, a brand-new amulet—and then there was a little bargain after all!

When attention flagged the Babuino raised his voice, of astonishing volume and timbre for so small a chest, and became a public crier, in a long and practised recitative, which he accompanied by remarks in a private undertone and emphasized now and then with one of his sudden bursts of laughter:

"Amulets! Amulets! Most excellent Santiago de Compostela! The apostle in silver-gilt, brass or lead, equally powerful, the protector of all seafaring men! Rosaries, imitation olive wood from the Garden of Gethsemane, rosaries that pray by themselves, rosaries! Crucifixes, in ivory or metal, for every passion! Relics, fragments of holy persons, every part of the body! Letters of indulgence, a selection in stock! Images of the Virgin, immaculate! Damaged at reduced price! Remedies! Salves! Rhinoceros-horn for love potions, genuine mummy from Egypt, stolen, with original smell! Prayer books, very effective! Books of magic! Secret books! Ha, ha, ha!"

The Babuino neighed and shook his lame leg; half of what he had uttered was enough to get him burnt alive, if anybody had been listening to his crowing; but all the rest were too busy crowing themselves, so he could play with fire as long as it amused him. The tavern was filled with a general roar, like a fire blazing at its highest.

But at last it burned itself out; after the fire comes the ash. The word went round that the Admiral had left the church at last and was about to take ship; the music died away, an uncanny daylight filled the corners of the tavern, all at once the guests broke up and streamed out to the boats in the river; a cannon shot from the *Santa Maria*

announced with a loud boom that the tide was on the turn; it was the signal, the hour of sailing had struck.

Just as Christopher Columbus was stepping into the boat to go off to the ships he was detained a few minutes, though without its attracting much attention; it was only the huckster they called the Babuino who crawled up to the tall skipper's feet and addressed him. Few heard what he said, and nobody understood him, he seemed to be talking Latin. Columbus stood at his full height with a very serious air, still calm and with a cleansed look on his face such as men wear when they come from Communion, and when he had heard all the creature had to say he turned and got into the boat without having uttered a word in answer, nor could any one see what impression the stranger's speech had made on him.

The huckster addressed Columbus in a hurried tone, corrected himself and made light of what he had just been saying, it was all idle words; he made all kinds of absurd gestures, quivering and twitching his face before the tall man as though the sun was in his eyes, but tittering as he wrung his foolish hands in deference—and suddenly all the squirms and grins were smoothed away from his chops, he looked up with the face of a human being, as though through many masks, a strangely old look; still chattering he withdrew, with an empty laugh in his throat, while some incomprehensible reflex action made him take leave of himself; he actually put out one hand and shook it with the other, crouching to the ground in confusion and showing all his teeth, two rows of big molars like millstones, his whole body twitching with a thousand promptings . . . and he was gone! And what was it he had said?

"*Vale*—good wishes for the voyage from an old voyager! Allow me to add: your worship's idea of trying to find

the Indies by sailing to the west, as I hear, when the Indies lie to the east, is not at all a bad one, since we know by experience that a problem can be solved by getting away from it in a diametrically opposite direction, he, he, he! A still quicker solution stares you in the face—why travel so far at all, when short cuts are so much pleasanter? The only proper voyage of discovery *has* been made, it is always the same: *a genibus ad genua* . . . and isn't that just where your worship comes from? Clack!"

He gave his sudden loud laugh, which sounded like the roar of a beast, but checked it at once and came a step nearer, with gleaming eyes, and dropped his voice confidentially, fleering with his tongue out:

"The greatest distance mankind can cover, isn't it a marking time on the same spot? Listen to a piece of advice; save yourself a costly, doubtful voyage and take up a study at home—this book that I have, for instance, *Itinerarium Amoris*, written by a connoisseur, a gynographer, a great rarity even as a volume, I may say, a unique copy, second century vellum, belonged once to the Library of Alexandria, from which I removed it, a dishonest thing to do, but it adds to its value as a curiosity; altogether an inestimable volume, isn't it? . . . But I'm talking nonsense, trying to sell voyages to a man with his foot on the gangway! The sea is calling! Won't you have an amulet to take with you? Or an innocent idol, a little woman, you're so lonely at sea; look here, no bigger than the palm of my hand, a bronze of Aphrodite, wonderful patina, the noblest Greek work, smoothed by the hands of centuries of connoisseurs, but intact in spite of all, Woman herself, in her ripe maiden bloom, ever young . . . no, not that either! The sea is calling! Well, I must leave too—and who knows which of us will go farthest, your worship with

your big ships or I with my old seven-leagued boots? Our ways part. You go to the South, and I am bound for the North. Spain no longer offers an abiding place for an old wanderer, and he has no idea of taking the backward road to Africa again with the Arabs. Ah yes, the earth burns under him here, it's getting too hot for him, he must seek cooler pastures. If they prepare stake and faggots for the old man, he rises from the ashes like the phœnix, as everybody knows; but does everybody know what the fire tastes like . . . sssss! In proof that he can go he shakes the dust of Spain from his feet, ai, ai, ai!"

He raised first one foot and shook it thoroughly, then the other and shook that too; he looked all round him, hunted, desperate, like a rat in a trap; he sighed, and his distorted features were relaxed, giving way to a human expression, an old man's sorrow, but only for an instant, then he was twitching again, indomitably mocking:

"Well, good-bye! Until we meet again! As I say, your worship goes south and I north, though really it should be the other way. But perhaps we shall meet nevertheless . . ."

He came quite close, put his hand to his mouth and whispered: "Yes, now we're going each in his own direction . . . *but the earth is round!*"

After this stab he hurriedly made off:

"Vale!"

At sunrise the field labourers who were up early saw a little man with staff in hand and pedlar's box on his back taking the northern road out of Palos, with halting steps, but covering the ground fast; at the same time they heard the firing of salutes and ringing of all the town's bells, as Columbus sailed with his ships.

The sun lay as a huge red sphere on the horizon as the ships cast off and began to swing down with the tide, saluting with all their pieces. And the bells of Palos kept on: they were but small, those in St. George's Church and a few other chapels; the bells of La Rabida Convent sounded from their height, and in the distance all the bells of Huelva could be heard; all the parish bells out in the country round joined in, it sounded like a regular discussion between a fleet that was sailing and all the churches that stayed behind. It was not like the booming of the great cathedral bells inland in the river cities of Europe, but to make up for it the little bells of the coast went more rapidly, in a fussy tempo, reminding one of swarming bees and people running after them, beating brass mortars and anything that would make a noise, and the meaning seemed to be the same: Will you stop, will you stop! said the bells, chiming and tolling, but the ships would not stop, they fired astern with heavy guns that made the whole hull tremble, shrouded themselves in smoke and warped out of the mouth of the river with the ebb tide under their keels, one big clumsy caravel in front and two smaller and lighter ones behind with their poops towards Palos.

When well out in the bay they all set sail and began to heel over and make way, the Atlantic received them with a swell in which they rose and sank; from the land the three ships were seen nodding in the sea and slowly growing less as though carried away by an undercurrent out into the gently breathing ocean. At last, when they were far out, flags and pennants were seen to be hauled down, a white cloud shot out from the stern of the *Santa Maria* and lay upon the waves, a distant report was heard as though muffled by blankets, the farewell shot.

But those on board saw the Spanish coast unfold itself,

turning about its headlands; sunbeams rose fan-like in the direction of Cadiz, the interior of the country extended and came in sight the farther they left it behind, but lost its sharpness; high up in the distance the airy snow-chain of the Sierra Nevada hovered like a cloud among the clouds, the land stretched out its arms to them on both sides of the bay. But as the coast grew vague and began to sink into the sea some of the crew went to the bulwarks and kissed both hands, stretching them out to land in an impassioned gesture, and their eyes moistened, they felt a stab in the breast, the parting was more than they could bear.

Only Columbus paced backwards and forwards on the highest part of the poop, a place he never left thenceforth, backwards and forwards, with his face intently turned in the direction of the ship's course, to the south-west; and, whether he was conscious of it or not, he never once turned to look back towards Spain. At a gesture from him the green wreaths, now withered, with which the ship had been decorated before sailing were thrown overboard. And now those of the crew who had had to be kept below, prisoners and pressed men, were let out; they ran round the deck like dogs, sniffing at the sea and towards the land—a league away—and towards the open sea ahead—*Madre de Dios!*—some of them, old pale-faced men, simply shook their heads, knew that it was all up with them, but the young ones threw themselves on the deck wringing their hands and burst into tears, as though the bottom had been knocked out of their existence and the whole of life was trying to weep itself out at once.

The gulls followed the ships, conversing among themselves in their parsimonious language, with an eye on the wake. With ships they were quite familiar—what? you

so often saw an island of peculiar oblong shape break away from the land and drift off on its own account, possibly babies that were born of the land and went off to visit other shores. They were not the kind of island you settled or nested on, certainly not; there were men on them and it wouldn't do to come too near, but there was this about the islands that not unfrequently something fit to eat dropped off them, the gulls know that. *Meev,* they say to each other as they fly; that means that the day is blue, all is right with sea and sky.

But towards evening the gulls began nevertheless to have misgivings; they were accustomed to see travelling islands keep between coasts that could both be seen at once, at any rate from a height, but these three seemed to be going in a straight line away from all land and out to where there were no more coasts at all. That was too much even for the gulls, and the time came when *they* turned back.

For the first few days not many words were heard from the Admiral on board the *Santa Maria;* he walked the poop with closed lips and dark brows, not to be appeased, even by the fact that now they actually *had* got away, so furious had he been at one delay after another up to the very last.

For they were to have sailed in the spring, everything had been based upon that, a very important thing to have the summer in front of one, of course; now they were leaving when summer was gone and autumn coming on—it was significant of the whole plan, of his whole life. When he was young he was ready with his plan but met with every possible hindrance; now, when at last he was to have the chance of his life, he felt with insuperable bitterness that it was after the time; he had already reached the age when a man looks back. Fourteen years, fourteen

long years, from the age of twenty-eight to forty-two, those years of a man's life in which his activity is at its highest, simply to get the vessels fitted out; and now that the voyage was to begin he was stiff and grey-headed, grown grey before his time from vexation at the time that was lost! Impatience, impatience, and nothing to show for it but his years! On then to death, in full sail, if death was all he had to seek!

Once more, for the last time, those fourteen years of adversity passed through his memory; he recalled all his humiliations, and the crew watched the Admiral quicken his pace on the poop, where he walked up and down like a lion; they saw his face swell and turn still redder, and they thought his black looks were meant for them and cast down their eyes, threw themselves eagerly upon some piece of work or other. But it was the years in Portugal that were in the Admiral's mind, the lost years, the insults, the impossibility of moving any one, until some back-handed advantage to themselves occurred to them: the King sending ships out into the Ocean behind Columbus's back, following the course he had laid down—leaving *him* in the lurch as a crazy person and stealing his idea! The great can do such things! That is why they own kingdoms! Of course. But when the King's men had been a couple of days out they got ocean sickness and turned back, reporting that the sea was too vast; they were quite benumbed, in a sort of delirium, and it was some time before they recovered themselves. Ho! A manly idea can always defend itself after all!

The Admiral stood still and raised his lion's head, embraced in a glance the ship below him, an absent glance, above the heads of all the crew; and they shrank from it, did not care to raise their eyes to the poop, any higher than

half-way up the ladder. They knew well that they deserved a good dead of contempt, not all had the fear of God in them when they came aboard. It almost seemed that they had a taste for the rope's end, and the rope was busy the first few days; the officers had been catching it from above and passed it on. If Diego thought he was on a yachting cruise he had made a mistake; the chaotic state in which he had joined ship was converted with an iron hand into the strictest discipline. Boatswain and master may have had their own opinion about this fool's trip, but so long as they were at sea all would be ship-shape! Before they reached the Canary Isles Diego was a sober man, obedient, smart, tarry about the hands from stropping aloft and with clean toes from much wholesome swabbing decks before breakfast.

Every fifth man of the crew, as every other man in Spain, was called Diego, that is, James, after the Apostle and Saint; Diego had just as much of his namesake as the name suggested, a distant resemblance worn by time; the rest he made up for by a picture of the holy Santiago stamped on a medal which he wore strung on his bare chest. Ashore Diego was a desperado, a bully for all bulls, as a coast-dweller equally ready for adventure in a mercenary army, as trooper or musketeer, or as a sailor and halberdier on board a galley, the arm was as indifferent to him as the element; this time it was the sea, half involuntarily, but such was at times the way of Diego's destiny; this adventure looked like being the most incalculable in extent and the most uncertain he had yet *nolens volens* been involved in.

Like a seed that had floated out to sea, with its germ and its possibilities as a plant if it reached land, such was Diego torn away from his Spain and committed to the

winds, with what there was in him, to take root—where?—or to die. And many things were concealed within that square Spanish head with its blue-shaven cheeks and its smouldering glance. What had not befallen the Andalusia from which he and his forefathers came? It had its name from the Vandals, a migratory Northern people, who had lost themselves in North Africa after having left their trace here. In return North Africa had pushed up into Spain for some centuries, the Moors with their Arab houses, the horse-shoe over their goings in and out, their cages for women, until they had recently been chased home to Africa again—several of the men on board had seen the banner of Castile hoisted on the towers of the Alhambra—but that did not mean that their ways were altogether driven out of Andalusia. Other foreigners had laid waste here and left their marks behind them, the Goths, the Romans, the Greeks; still farther back the ancient peoples of Africa, old Carthage; in the earliest ages the Phœnicians, those sea-rats from Asia Minor who had their noses everywhere—and Diego had a sprinkling of all of them in his blood, or was marked by their contact as one is by one's neighbors; he had inherited a turbulent destiny from his ancestors, was brave, covetous, blood-thirsty, a destroyer, but had the same godlike contempt of death as those Northern dare-devils to whom fear was the only known crime; he was grandiose, with the Spanish bearing that had come down from the Romans together with the toga, the cloak with which to drape one's unwashedness, and he was untrustworthy as is sometimes the way in the Mediterranean countries, he had passion but came short in feeling, in love an Asiatic, violent, above all inconstant—and yet at bottom an Iberian, a primitive Spaniard, for ever reposing in his nature, contradictory and loosely connected as it was;

all in all a human creature, very long-suffering, amiable, with a soul full of music—for among his mothers had been the mutest and most beautiful of all the women of earth.

Such was the Diego who was now at sea and who raised his eyes with a respect none too genuine to the quarter-deck, the holy of holies, where the Admiral paced his unresting watch—when all was said and done he was the strongest for the time being (the cursed Italian), the man whom it was best to look to, if one wanted to get out of this predicament. The powder-barrels in the *Santa Maria's* hold were charged with a soul like Diego's, sulphur, charcoal and saltpetre superficially mixed but with a hell imprisoned within them which could be released by a spark, and the spark was smouldering in Diego's Kabyle eyes.

The Admiral for his part kept an eye full of reservations on his crew; when he had walked off the rancour of his thoughts of Portugal he began to quicken his pace and turned yet more sharply in his walk up and down the narrow poop as he recalled what had befallen him in Spain, his nostrils snorted at the thought. Eight years' empty talk! All the shoes he had worn out in the pursuit of royal personages, in company with suppliants, lackeys and toadies; the smile that appeared on every silly face when he was seen or mentioned, Columbus, the eccentric, even the children hooting in the street when he passed by! The Council at Salamanca that was to test his scheme! Postponements, hopes and disappointments, up and down, poverty, homelessness, the fickleness and apathy of princes, a long long laborious pilgrimage which had taught him what beggars have to suffer. Day after day with his resolution blazing within him, ready for the leap, and day after day nothing but a fresh insight into human nature, year

in, year out, all through the years! That last weary journey, when abandoning all hope he had quitted Cordova with his little boy, intending to leave Spain, and came to the convent by Palos, Santa Maria la Rabida, and begged bread in the name of God and for the first time felt with horror that he was an old man—ah, then his luck had changed, then it was that he was able to get away. But never could he forget and never would he forgive what he had felt that time, when with shaking hand he accepted the gift to himself and his boy—that old people's hands shook in just that way.

Again the Admiral stood still up on the poop, and Diego glancing up saw that he was terrible, the big, tall grey man was seeing visions and execrating spirits, how else could he have that frightful look? And Diego crept behind something, where the evil eye could not fall on him, crossing himself in great detail, on his forehead and over his chest, from shoulder to shoulder; "*Madre!*" he whispered, and turned quite grey in the face. A strong man, the one up there, and who could tell what Powers he was in league with?

But as the days went by before they reached the Canary Isles, where they put in for repairs, most of August and the early part of September, the feeling on board gradually became less strained. After all they were still within the known world, and the crew could not keep up the sense of their misfortune for weeks on end. Diego revived his forgotten songs, and poured out his soul in passionate chest-notes to the winds of heaven; he was full of sweet speech as a wooer, all his thousand bereavements; and at whiles when he had time—and the calm fine weather gave more than enough leisure, the sails stood for days and nights

without having to be braced about—he got a game of dice on deck, shook the deceptive cubes out of the box and glared to see how many pips he had thrown, himself with a die for a head and a cinq in his face. They did not play for nothing; what money and valuables there were on board travelled by degrees from one Diego to another and back again, several times; now a man would be the owner of all the movable property in the ship, the object of cringing deference on the part of all the rest, now he would be reduced to beggary again, but whatever happened it stayed in the family. Play was hot, at times not without danger to life and limb, blood boiled up. Diego was stirred to the depths of his soul when luck went against him, he staked everything he possessed, down to his shirt, and his lips could be seen moving as he made secret promises to the Virgin Mary; and when he lost in spite of that he tore his shirt to strips, and included the Mother of God in an oath which cannot be repeated, an exclamation which placed the Holy Virgin in the same class as the unclean creature on whose flesh in a smoked condition the crew lived daily, God's curse on it! At last Diego staked his amulet, and when that too was lost, and he was a naked heathen, he gambled for his hair, his life, his sweetheart, his share of heaven, everything, until at last his luck actually did turn.

Next day Diego might have won back all his possessions and a good deal of the others'. For a change they played cards, those who knew how; higher notions of numbers were required here and the illiterate contented themselves with looking on, a numerous and interested crowd around the few sorcerers who sat in a ring on deck with their naked feet under them, conjuring, each with a fan of the apocalyptically painted leaves in his hand. It was the book of fortune and its reading entailed excitement, the

players disagreed and stabbed one another with their eyes, tapped the deck angrily with their fingers, nodded ferociously and shuffled the cards again; they smacked one card after another on to the deck like a blacksmith swinging his hammer: *espadilla, basta, punto,* and the adversary was smashed! They wrinkled their foreheads and thought, threw down all the cards at once and pushed across ducats from one pile to the other, the whole quite incomprehensible to the illiterates who looked on in wonder; how did they manage to keep it all in their heads? With the pictures on the cards they were familiar enough, there were knaves, kings and queens, lovely to look upon, the only ladies they had on board, sad to say; Diego pressed a card to his bosom, clasped it with both his arms in a storm of passion; it was the Queen of Hearts—oh, well, well!

What had come over Diego? He was seen to embrace the water-butt when he came near it, and poured tender words over it; his voice had a queer ring in it, he sang evening hymns and was ready to die of grief, he was gay, fantastic, witty, not exactly decorous, there were few things that didn't prompt his fancy in a particular way, the swelling sails, ho, hey! how they stretched, how they stretched, the mast seemed so straight, slender as a waist, and he had to embrace that too; he kissed his fingers and made declarations of love to the *Niña,* their sister, sailing a little way off; the *Pinta* didn't matter so much, that was a he-ship, but Sister was so sweet, she curtsied so sweetly in the waves, dipped her bow with a girlish air, with foam like a lace collar round her neck, and she had such tight little white sails, hey ho!

Even in the highest quarter there was a change of mood for the better during those sunny days before reaching the Canaries; the Admiral now and then opened his lips, occa-

sionally indeed he came down from the poop and mixed with mortals in the waist of the ship, and Diego had an opportunity of finding out that this man of mystery had a warm and pleasant smile and was in certain respects the most unpretending of all on board.

At other times he was to be seen deeply engaged in his measurements and algebraic arts; every day he hung his astrolabe out in the sun and let it and the elements work upon one another, not without a shiver down Diego's back; properly speaking, no doubt, the magic disc with all its secret signs and the man who used it ought to have been burnt, except that of course the safety of the ship depended on his arts, but it was nasty to look at. At night the Admiral pointed up at the sky with a big pair of compasses straddling between the stars, presumptuously and with a lack of the deference due to one's Creator; necessary, may be, for the navigation of the ship, but Diego didn't like to see it.

And when it was Diego's turn at the helm they were serious hours for him; the actual steering was easy enough, but he could not get used to the presence of the compass, it gave him an uncanny feeling to watch the living, quivering needle in its glass house making for the north all the time with its nose, whichever way the ship was heading; it was what he had to steer by, but it made him uncomfortable all the same, like some kinds of worms and creeping things with feelers. At night Diego's hair was apt to stand on end when he watched the needle nosing about in the gleam of the little lamp; whatever Powers lay behind it, *he* had no compact with them, and Diego crossed himself time and again, he steered and he followed the compass, but beyond that it would have to be on the head of the skipper.

As regards the Admiral, he was calm, with a deep and powerful breathing; at last he had put the years behind him and looked forward to what was to come. He was at sea, and sailing was his nature, he felt more and more at home with every day that passed.

Now they were going as they ought, southward; autumn was advancing, but it grew warmer every day! Ah, age had touched him, they had robbed him of his years, God forgive them, but now, every hour he grew older he was approaching—what was he approaching? Eternal summer, said the sun, the soft air, which every day was softer, the fair wind said it, the waves that leisurely advanced before him like great blue outriders, the stars said it, the stars!

With them Columbus consorted in the long refreshing nights, to them he raised his soul and accompanied them on their sure but inscrutable paths. Abaft the ship's course and high up in the sky stood the lodestars, the two stars in the Little Bear which the seaman steers by, near the North Star, round which in the course of a night they make a half compass, the great clock of heaven whose tilting always tells the seaman what time it is at night. Beneath it the Great Bear, the mighty constellation which takes up more space in the heavens than any other—and yet how immensely greater is the rest of the sky! Orion rises and flaunts himself in the sky like an eagle with spreading wings, the evening star shows its distant gleaming soul, advancing visibly day by day, the moon, that blind one, our friend by night, the beautiful great moon!

Never did he tire of the starry sky, of being under it and watching its movements from evening to morning; Columbus, the sleepless one, fed his soul on the march of time, saw the sun come up and break out of the sea, saw it take

its sovereign course over the heavens, till it sank again red and mighty in the sea on the other side, and it was as though time and space left their mark on his inmost sense, he *felt* how long they had sailed and what was his position; an extraordinary cosmic second sight took possession of him, in the calm nights when he was alone on the poop and the stars swung above him it was as though he could hear the music of the seven spheres of heaven, one within the other, shrill but immensely distant; for brief ecstatic instants he caught the feeling of what the reason knows but cannot turn into an image: the heavens and their revolutions with all the heavenly bodies that lie in the same sphere. On rare occasions he thought he heard a crinkling sound, muffled by thousands of miles, and nodded: the axles of the spheres creaking against one another, and the night seemed to him so vast, how mighty was the mill of heaven! Almighty!

And then when he turned his eyes from the shining nails of the vault of heaven the ocean lay beneath him in a ring, colossal, and yet he knew how small a patch it was that could be seen at any time; the ocean stretched to infinity, it made a man dizzy—so enormous, so incomprehensibly wide was the earth!

There was one thing that could be felt. In this very thing Columbus's profoundest experience was wrapped up, an observation summed up through all his life at sea, in itself inconceivable and yet based on direct perception, or a kind of feeling: the earth was round! This had already been declared in ancient writings, though not in the Bible, but a man must have seen it himself, so to speak, to be clear about it. And it was the altitude of the stars, their angle with the horizon, that told it. When one had familiarized one's self with the position of the stars in the sky and had

sailed sufficiently far north and south, between Iceland and Guinea, as Columbus had, and when one kept an estimate of distances the whole time, the log, which Columbus carried in his head more than any man had ever done, then one could perceive that the earth was round, nay, in a certain inexpressible sense one could feel how *big* it was.

It was this observation and his inner conviction that had given Columbus his idea of a circumnavigation. For if the earth was round up and down, from north to south, it must also be so from east to west, around the Equator; and if one sailed due west for sufficiently long one must end by going right round the earth. Nobody would believe it; now it should be proved!

Sailing from Spain as far south as the Canary Isles the difference in altitude was already conspicuous to one who was practised in watching it; indeed, to a certain extent the difference could be felt every day; one was conscious of sailing on an immensely extended spherical surface, from north to south, and not for a moment did one lose the sense of how far west one had come.

Now, when he was as far south as he thought of going, the course would be set due west, and then they would see!

In the clear starry nights when Columbus was alone with the universe he could *see* that he was right. How else were the sun and moon and all the fixed stars and planets, the spheres in short, able to swing about the earth, unless it was round and suspended freely in space?

II

ON THE OCEAN

FROM August 9 to September 6, almost a month, they were delayed at the Canary Isles: it was the *Pinta* that had lost her rudder, a sneakish trick of the two men who owned the ship and were taking part in the voyage but wanted to be left behind—treachery and delays to the last, a yet deeper insight into human nature; but the damage was repaired, and with the loss of a month the voyage was resumed, now due west into the Ocean, towards open sea where nobody had ever sailed before.

Tenerife was in eruption that year, and when Columbus sailed past it at night-time the crew of the *Santa Maria* had a vision that took the marrow out of their bones, the whole sky full of blood-red fire, the immense cone in the midst of the sea, illumined from top to bottom by its own flame, smoke and red-hot stones shooting up from the summit which seemed split with veins of fire, lava streams reaching far down the mountain's sides. The deck of the ship was as light as by day, for miles on all sides the night was banished, but stood like a jet-black wall around the horizon. Lightnings came and went amid the smoke, and deep boomings arose as though from below the bottom of the sea. It was a foretaste of the end of the world that the sailors were given; and if the impression afterwards gave place to others it had nevertheless sunk in and did not make them any bolder for the voyage.

Nor had their stay in the Canary Isles been of a kind to

harden them; a good deal of softness and self-will that had been fostered ashore on the enchanting islands had to be driven out again by the rope's end before they had a taste for plain seaman's work. Diego, who had come in contact with creatures of a strange native charm, some of the few Guanchos left unmixed in the islands, had added a fresh influence to the many and various ones that had already contributed to form his character; he was out of humour the first few days on board, with something foreign about him, and seemed to be nursing memories that were only half his own, the other half distant; and Diego shaded his eyes with his hand and gazed back at the cone of Tenerife till it floated away in its own veil, like a woman shrouding her face in her hair; he was melancholy, little inclined for talk all day.

But next morning when Tenerife was no longer in sight he surprised his mates by breaking out into new songs, with wild melodies of their own and a text of which he only knew fragments, in a language of which he only understood a few words, the sweetest ones; they often came back to him on the voyage like an echo which made Diego sad; and when the *Niña* aired her white hangings alongside, the only reminder of anything sisterly left on the wide ocean, Diego shook his head bent down between his knees as he sat on deck, he was the poorest man that sailed the sea.

On September 8 they got a stiff north-easterly breeze, just what was wanted, and it held, it had come in earnest. One morning they looked around and could no longer spy a vestige of land, the desolate ring of Ocean all the way round, and they looked at each other: was that the idea? Their hearts sank. Yes, that was the idea; up on the poop walked the Admiral with a face there was no mistaking; he had them in his hand, and he would use them, to the

end. They were dazed, their eyes sought help from the other ships which were in sight, now near at hand, now farther off, sailing the same course, due west; and from them no doubt eyes were turned to the *Santa Maria.* There were these three little ships sailing together and keeping each other company, and beyond them nothing but the wide and terrible Ocean. . . .

That first forenoon tears were shed in secret, men came upon each other with red eyes everywhere; deep down in the hold where he had been sent to fetch something a man met a friend in the dark who turned his face away; up aloft where a sail had to be cleared he found a comrade who had climbed up into solitude to weep; the cook in his galley had red eyes. But they could see by the man of iron up aft that there was no turning back. He paced up and down, like a lion, with his eyes on the west, those fathomless eyes, blue as the sea—was he then the sea itself? He was calm, as if he knew the way, as if he was only going home, with his cargo of innocents that he had lured on board—was it Death himself they had shipped with?

The *Santa Maria* pitched in the long, deep Atlantic seas with her curving hull, high fore and aft, like a cradle rocking in the sea, her timbers groaned, her yards and tackle swung, her bows stamped up a collar of green translucent water and foam; she was no good sailer, but now she had a fair wind, and she made headway.

The clumsy caravel—which is a word derived from crab—built half as a fortress, combined in herself the same elements that were found aboard of her. At core she was a viking ship, with a mainmast and a big squaresail, of a hundred tons burthen, like a middle-sized schooner of our days, overcrowded with her crew of fifty-two. In her build she must have been derived from the fleets of the

Normans, who made their way into the Mediterranean and left their traces on its shipping, Genoa, Venice—the gondola!—Spain too, where they penetrated up the rivers, the Guadalquivir; but in the Mediterranean they had added to her the lateen sail aft on a mast of its own, and forward she had got another extra mast with a smaller squaresail, and before that on the bowsprit she carried a still smaller squaresail to steady her; above the main course a topsail was set; she was a ship on the way from one type to another. The castles fore and aft were excrescences based on experience of land warfare, floating towers. The oars of the Norman ship were gone; in place of them she had artillery, little cast cannons, falconets and lombards, she could make a noise and do mischief at long range. Gothic was the style of the rich carvings all over the woodwork. In board she carried the Middle Ages and the Mediterranean, a leader of Northern ancestry, seer, wanderer and ferryman, and a ship's company with the multifarious heritage and the dark fiery blood which the Mediterranean had mingled together from all its shores and all its ages.

And as the caravel was now rocking in the sea, with a rolling, laborious gallop in which she seemed to be pulling herself in, but keeping steadily on, all day long, towards the sunset—a gigantic red sun like a one-eyed cyclops burying himself alone in the lonely ocean and leaving a bloody sky and clotted seas behind—so she rocked on through the brief evening, into the night, heeling over a little with the wind on her quarter; she was a caravel with a mission, she would sail day and night until she reached what she would reach!

Behind her lay the Europe she had left, an ancient world of conflict, countries and peoples mutually involved in

relations of conquest and dependence, the Europe of popes, emperors and kings, of proud chivalry and of peasants buried in hovels and obscurity; the all-powerful bishops, the hordes of monks, the burnings of heretics, the commonalty bound hand and foot by the powers above them; the ascending ladder of the feudal nobility; the princes with their arbitrary interchange of kingdoms, their policy of marriages and wars of succession; Europe like a string of great estates, which in fact were soon to be married into one hand, nearly all of them!

But down on the ground it was getting warm, like a fermenting hotbed. A certain Doctor Faust was perambulating Europe with his arts, Satan was abroad! A nine-year-old boy was in Mansfield, having Christian doctrine instilled into him and getting birched, the same year that Columbus sailed from Palos—Martin Luther. Copernicus was nineteen and carried within him the germ of revolutions. The peasants of Europe were meeting in their miserable alehouses and clamouring like dogs; nobody noticed them, and yet more than one great lord, riding by with hawk on hand, would be cudgelled to death in his armour by the swarming mob.

The Europe of that day towered up as though built for eternity, its central pillar was carried down through the earth to the basic rock; but it was after all the shell of an old tortoise they had built upon, and one fine day it moved in its thousand years' sleep and pushed its lizard's head out of the slime. . . .

The *Santa Maria* then had chosen a good time for sailing; Europe's heaven had lasted long enough, it was time to knock a hole in it.

Whatever might be happening at home, *they* were shut

out from it, who now felt imprisoned, ringed about by the sea; perhaps they would never see the Old World again. And no word would ever be brought home of what had become of them, they would not even win the fame of the ill-fated like other poor brave men who perish and have a tomb and a great name; they would simply disappear, and soon even their disappearance would be forgotten.

So hard he was, the man aft! They thought they could understand a good deal, those who were with him, but this they could not understand, that he could expose himself to a trackless, inglorious death, for the sake of an exploit the issue of which no man could tell—no, that they could not understand.

A mournful feeling prevailed on board on the second and third days; in the morning they came on deck and saw the ocean's desolate ring, no land either ahead or astern, the loathsome waves, the sun travelling naked and pitiless in the sky, casting a glaring light on their misery, sea and sea and the bare sky right in their faces!

Cheerlessly the sun went down, a faded sea on every side, then darkness; with loud creaking the *Santa Maria* laboured in the waves, plunging and plunging on her way into the uncertain gloom, towards the west.

That night Diego rolled himself up in a corner on deck, too hot to sleep down below. How hot it was getting! What would be the end of it? He shut his eyes tight, clenched his teeth upon his seething inside—impossible to sleep, impossible to lie awake. But a little while after he did fall asleep and twitched his limbs as he slept, with muffled groans from his troubled, racking dreams.

High on the poop a dark waking figure could be seen, the Admiral, with his everlasting rods and circles in his hand, sighting up at the moon, always busy with some

celestial tricks—did he never sleep? Night and day he was to be seen on the poop—did he need no sleep at all? He couldn't even be human!

Oh yes, the Admiral slept, a nap now and then, when it could not be avoided, but he never went regularly to bed. He could not do that, for he had the log in his head and dared not lose his estimate of the distance sailed. When he slept it was for a short spell, just such and such a time; he had himself called when the fixed time was up and was thus able to retain his sense of the passing of the hours in conjunction with the headway they were making. And as an old sailor he knew no difference between night and day.

There was another figure moving on the forecastle, the look-out on watch; to-night it was young Pedro Gutierrez; he walked up and down and seemed much engrossed by the moon; he could be heard singing pious songs—evidently a queer fellow.

Young Pedro had joined as a volunteer; he was the son of decent people, but had no means and lent an ear to the siren voices which promised rapid fortunes at sea. On board he had made himself remarked by his innocence and nice behaviour; he would have been an easy butt, if he had not also proved himself a swordsman not to be meddled with. He was very taciturn, his thoughts were fixed on other things than those of the rest, and finally he was allowed to go about unnoticed.

To-night he was singing, standing still by the rail and looking out over the sea where the moon was about to set, thoughtful, with slender, soft features, manly enough but so handsome that it seemed a lovely young girl was buried in them, his mother, who was now so far away. He raised his eyes in the starlight, sighed and sang:

Now comes the sea's fell darkness,
The moon sinks fast and hides;
And coldly blows the porpoise
Against the ship's thin sides.
With oily cry a seagull
Bodes ill for us to-night.
But I must keep my watch here,
Until the sun brings light.

The Virgin's starry garment
Is spread across the sky.
We men can be hopeful
And pray to those on high.
We cannot, if we wished it,
Foresee what still shall be—
O vouch, our Lord's sweet Mother,
That land again we see!

With many a tear at parting,
But with courageous mind,
We waved a tender farewell
To those we left behind.
When shall I see my father?
Where is my sweetheart gone?
The ocean's ways affright me.
Am I to die so soon?

Within my father's garden
There grows an apple tree,
A joyful gift from Heaven,
Where many a bird can be.
In springtime when the bee hums
It stands with blossom gay;
And when the birds are silent
It flings its fruit away.

Behind the ancient hedgerow
We used to hide, we two;

'Twas there, my only loved one,
You promised to be true.
Ah, shall I ever see it,
That dear old apple tree?
Will you be there, my darling,
To share its shade with me?

No green leaves here can greet us.
The sea's as salt as tears.
A creature 'midst the billows
Lives lonely with his fears.
Who knows where ocean ceases?
Where shall our voyage end?
In thy hands are we, Mother.
A happy landfall send!

The distant lands of promise,
Where all is made of gold,
They give us dreams of riches,
Until we grow too old.
But what a seaman suffers
I'll tell from what I know—
There's many a time I'm longing
To a dry grave to go.

Beyond the seas and rivers
Lies Paradise, they say—
O merciful God's Mother,
Preserve our souls this day!
To thee in Heaven's glory
We raise our sinful hand—
Give us a peaceful mid-watch,
And bring us back to land!

It was thirty-five days before they sighted land, a long time for men with such crazy nerves as most of the ship's company; to the inflexible leader himself the longest time he had known. As was to be expected, he had great difficulties with his crew.

The deep despondency of the first few days after they had lost sight of land soon gave way to insubordination; there were scowling looks, some trial of strength was felt to be coming, it would have to be seen whether it was safe to treat Spaniards in this fashion; eyes that till now had kept to the deck or never gone higher than the ladder were now fixed with a sinister challenge upon the Admiral. It came to a kind of collision, not open warfare, only a trial, and it fell out in this way.

Among themselves the crew talked of nothing but turning back; they said not a word to the Admiral, but they began to steer badly. It happened more and more frequently that the helmsman was awkward enough to let her come up into the wind, with a northerly course; they were trying it on, those that took the helm, gave the Admiral a stiff look and fell off their course, like naughty children seeing how far they could go. They were corrected and the course was resumed; the Admiral seemed to have no suspicion of what they were up to, or pretended with angelic patience not to see it.

But one morning the game was up on both sides. Contrary to his custom, the Admiral had left the quarter-deck for a short time, and when he came up again, and looked round, the course had been laid as near north as the ship would lie. . . . A couple of seconds later he was at the helm himself, laid his fists over the helmsman's and turned the ship back into a westerly course, turned the tiller with the man and all, and he was no wisp of straw either, a very stalwart man that same helmsman, but his legs trailed under him like a doll's, the Admiral just took a sweep with him and the tiller and the ship herself; she lay right over with the hard helm, heeled round into her new course, and the horizon danced a quarter of the way round. It was

just as if the Admiral had lifted the whole vessel and put her down again!

And he was not out of breath after it, hadn't changed colour, was scarcely angry; he only smiled with amusement and a trifle ominously at Sancho Ruiz, the chief mate, who had allowed the thing to happen.

It did not happen again. The helmsman looked at his hands, which were all crumpled, and afterwards soaked them in a bucket of water—they had been badly crushed. The rest of the crew went about their work with pale lips. Had any one imagined that he was so strong! That he was as big as an ox could be seen, but that he was so quick! He was *invisible* for the second it took him to dash to the helm, he leapt like a heavy cat, and those big freckled spades of hands with their red bristles, why they were blacksmith's tongs and not human hands at all. Unfair!

After that there was nothing wrong with the steering. The dark smouldering eyes the Admiral found turned upon him wherever he went had now a look of suffering, but the spite in them was concealed for the time being. The temper of the ship was dull for a few days, while the open sea still stretched as open before them, and the feeling of how far they were from land grew more and more dismal. And now the sea began to change its character; they still had the finest weather, but somehow the sea was more hollow, it ran in an ugly swell which lifted the *Santa Maria* as high as a house up and down besides making her roll and pitch; it took away the breath of many of them and was an unmistakable warning that they were beginning to sail out of the world and were approaching zones where there was perhaps no world at all. What made the ocean rock in such an abysmal way?

A mast which they saw one day drifting in the sea, a big piece of mast from a ship that must have been bigger than the *Santa Maria*, seemed to answer their anxious question. The ship had been wrecked somewhere in these waters, and if such a big ship could not live, what would become of smaller ones? The Admiral, whom they approached on this serious subject, took a different, cynical view and made light of the whole matter: that a ship had gone down here seemed to him a proof that the sea was just like any other sea—such things happened. Beyond the world there were no ships at all, they might be sure. For that matter nobody could tell how far or from what direction the mast had drifted. With this consolation the crew went to their quarters and wept. The sad piece of wreckage had made them so sorrowful, it had such a mournful look.

It rolled so forsakenly in the sea with its splintered top, green with slime, waterlogged and lying under the surface, always awash, and when the wave sank from it the end of the mast hung with dripping seaweed and studded with barnacles on its under side; and once it had been shaped by human hands, a tree once in the forest, and now the corpse of a mast in the sea's desolate wet churchyard, a thing rocking in the waves, floating with the current, abandoned to a drift unknown, lonely, lonely, travelling out of one horizon into another, a thing without a face and yet like a living creature, it broke one's heart to see it, as the waves carried it away and dashed over it in their sport; as long as it was in sight they gazed after it, and when it could no more be seen they turned away with tearful eyes.

The Admiral observed it too, long and carefully; the rate at which they left it astern was to him a welcome clue for the day's log and for estimating their leeway.

The thirteenth of September was an unlucky day. Not immediately so far as the crew were concerned, they only heard of it afterwards, but that day their fate hung in the balance, as also did several of the heavenly bodies, apparently, racing the compass-needle! Well, a layman forms his own interpretation of matters he is not conversant with but which reach him by way of rumour; perhaps indeed he sees into the heart of things in his own way, even if he is not an astronomer. It was reported that the compass had been deceptive that day, so grossly deceptive that even the man at the helm had noticed it, pointing a good way to one side of north, where it should have been. A serious business, which of course the Admiral tried to hush up, until the sailing master and the mate discovered it for themselves and called the Admiral's attention to it a day or two later. With them, of course, the Admiral could make no secret of what had happened, the magnetic needle *had* deviated considerably from north to west; but was it necessarily the compass that was wrong, might it not be the North Star that had fallen a few degrees out of its orbit?

And it actually appeared that he had succeeded in convincing the other navigators of this, for nothing more came of the affair—they went on sailing as before. Properly speaking, wasn't it a much worse thing that the North Star was toppling? An omen, one would imagine, a clear hint from above. How was it with this foreigner's Christianity if he disregarded such a warning?

More probably, though, it was the compass that pointed wrongly, and that was in reality a terrible thing; it could mean nothing else but that they were nearing the magnet mountain, which, of course, was situated somewhere out here at the world's end; and if once you came within range of its attraction you were lost, the nails and everything of

iron would fly out of the ship, going clean through the woodwork, timbers and planks would fall asunder, the ship would part and become a mass of wreckage in the water all in an instant! They had hopes the Admiral would be in full armour when it happened—to see him fly through the air, imagine him smacking against the magnet mountain and sticking to it, rotting against its wall head downwards! Joking apart, was it *justifiable* to keep to the course they were on when the magnetic needle had pointed its silent warning. If so, what did they have this invention of the devil for?

The crew were choking with tears and grievances. But the Admiral continued to pace the poop, calm as ever. Was he though? To tell the truth, this phenomenon of the variation of the compass, now observed for the first time, disturbed him not a little; in reality, he could imagine no explanation—except perhaps just the same as the crew's, that they were approaching some stronger magnetic force, since the needle turned. However, they were out to venture something after all. So long as the nails stayed in the ship they would go on sailing.

But two days after the unlucky Thirteenth something happened which for a while converted the *Santa Maria* into a madhouse, although in itself it was a far less ominous thing than the affair of the compass. A terrible great meteor fell from heaven—in broad daylight, so to speak, towards evening while it was still light. It came straight down from heaven, everybody saw it, like a mighty blazing tail of fire lashing down from on high and disappearing in the sea—with a boiling sound which many thought they had heard, a whistling up in space. The whole ship was one shriek after the fiery portent had gone out. Half the crew

lay howling on deck with their hands over their eyes, the rest ran about wailing and wringing their hands; those who kept their senses best fell on their knees and loudly invoked the Virgin Mary, repeating Ave after Ave. One hid himself under the water-butt, another bored his head into a coiled hawser like a worm, wriggling his body and legs outside; even the officers, Juan de la Cosa, Sancho Ruiz, Alonzo de Moguer, the ship's doctor, who ought to have known better, lost their presence of mind and raised an alarm. God's blood! they were all done for. . . .

And then nothing more happened. The mortal terror passed off; but this time the Admiral came right down from his lofty castle and mixed among the crew to calm them and explain the thing. How could they be so terrified of a big shooting star?

Shooting star! Scandalized exclamations, genuine indignation, hands left their faces and weeping eyes were riveted on the Admiral, chests heaving like bellows. What is the blasphemer saying? A portent, a holy portent, that was what it was.

Well, well, a portent if you like—the Admiral was conciliatory and ignored the smack of mutiny in their words—but it had shown itself beneficent, hadn't it? It didn't set fire to the ship but fell quite a long way off. For his part he had seen such falls of fire from heaven before. Perhaps it hurt their feelings to call them shooting stars, but still they were certainly phenomena which were to be explained in the same way, stars or other celestial lights which had come loose from the vault above and dropped down—a very common thing. Naturally there was a meaning in it, as in everything that came from heaven, but to call it a portent. . . .

It *was* a portent! the seamen sobbed. The softer among

them obstinately persisted in their grief, weeping and drying their eyes, sniffling inconsolably; but others went about in little knots with clenched teeth, looked at each other, and their eyes grew savage. It was pretty strong what that Italian had the face to offer them! To explain away God's obvious warning written in letters of fire! Had it happened astern of the ship as a warning against turning back? No, ahead, due west—could there be any doubt? Stars, celestial light—when the fire that fell was bigger than sun, moon and all the stars together! A natural explanation indeed! It was unwholesome to have so many heretics aboard of a ship—that and all the rest!

Scornful and insolent snorts were heard blended with the Admiral's kindly, restraining and reassuring voice. And the discussion was long. Darkness fell, and still they were disputing about the alarming occurrence; several were quite unnerved and spoke in the dying, tearful voice of men stunned by a disaster, while in others hate blazed up again and again. But at last their feelings calmed down. The Admiral talked and talked, and in the end the mere sound of his monotonous voice had a soothing effect.

And meanwhile they were sailing on, since nobody had thought of actually stopping the ship. The wind was fair; they were long past the place where the meteor had fallen. Mentally the Admiral calculated what distance they had covered, making up his log while the talk was going on. And that was until everybody turned in for the night, weary and dull with sorrow, many of them quite sick with emotion; here and there long-drawn sighs and chest-shaking sobs could still be heard from dark corners.

The Admiral went quietly back to his post, took observations and wrote for the rest of the night by the light of a little horn lantern. There was a special piece of work

which he preferred to do at night, the log-book, which with provident foresight and knowledge of human nature he kept in two versions: one, the correct one, for his own use, and one to be shown to his officers, who were then free to pass on the information; in this the distances sailed were shortened every day by as many miles as he dared; it was no use scaring the crew by telling them they were farther out in the ocean than was strictly necessary.

In the course of the night there was a milder panic, which however soon subsided: a man screamed out in terror and woke the others; he had happened to look over the side and had seen that they were sailing through nothing but fire, flames and gleaming waves all round the ship! Everybody flocked to the ship's side: wails and lamentations, they were sailing in sheer fire! The Admiral was down among them at once. Hadn't they ever seen phosphorescence before? Weren't they sailors, some of them at any rate? In the Mediterranean it was sometimes just as bright. Oh well, they were sleepy and sore and allowed themselves to be talked round. Some of them *had* seen it before and had only shouted because the others did. But others nodded and nodded, convinced in dead earnest. Of course, it was the fire that had fallen from heaven in the evening and they were sailing straight into it! Then the Admiral could not help laughing. How was it then that it hadn't set fire to the ship long ago? And he had a bucket of water drawn up and asked any one who liked to put his hand in it—it was quite cold. . . .

Well—cold; lukewarm, they would call it. And what was it then that shone down below in the water? That the Admiral could easily explain: it was simply the sunlight which the water had absorbed by day and gave off again at night. This explanation was received with hiccups—they

knew what they knew. A reflection from *down below*, Purgatory with the hatches off, may be . . . ! Growling and bitterness; some were not ashamed to turn their backs on the Admiral. Soon after the ship was asleep again.

But from now on the Admiral was more and more often on the main deck. He no longer considered his dignity so strictly, and it was remarkable how this man, hitherto so taciturn, developed eloquence; he would often discuss things with the simplest of the hands for hours at a time, things which he might easily have said were no concern of theirs. It did no harm to the distance which ought to be kept between commander and crew. In one respect he possessed a quality which nothing he said or did could add to or take away from—his size.

Its effect was sure, even if nobody, not even himself, was quite aware of it. But not only did he keep his direct power over the men's minds, he even began to make friends among them. Many of them had not really paid much attention to the Admiral before now, and discovered that this giant, who bore the stamp of courage and indomitable resolution, who at the same time was capable, as he had shown, of unexampled violence, that this man was good-natured at heart. The big head with its reddish-gray mane, and the beard, which was now allowed to grow and was also mottled red and white, would sometimes beam with human feeling, a warmth which reached him from creation in spite of all, and which he gave back again. He had a pleasant smile, which showed two great rows of worn teeth; the blue eyes, usually so distant, might turn with a look of their own upon any one he was talking to, he had quick intelligence and sympathy for everybody. They were curious eyes, quite light and small with white sur-

roundings and pink at the corners, something like what one sees in pigs, rather sore, for he scarcely slept at all. His voice was singular, rather small and weak for such an unusually big man, cautious, penetrated with loneliness and kindness towards men, even those who opposed him.

But it was felt that, whether silent or eloquent, he never disclosed his inmost thought, and to that no one ever succeeded in penetrating.

There was endless talking in the days that followed, on all kinds of subjects. The Admiral was almost always down on deck among the crew, all the time he could spare from his observations.

The *Santa Maria* seemed like a sort of floating school, with grown-up boys and a schoolmaster who towered above them all and was regarded with very diverse feelings, who gave lessons all day long, received complaints and gave instruction, over and over again—a providence that was never tired of leading its souls, not the way they would go but the way they should.

III

IN THE TRADE WIND

THE Sargasso Sea, hundreds of leagues from land; three little ships lost on the boundless ocean, and their crews in despair.

The worst of their fright over this threatening new phenomenon, the masses of seaweed floating mile after mile in the ocean, had subsided; but it had been a hard trial. The first floating island of weed was taken for firm ground, land; it looked like a very low stretch of meadow lying flush with the water, and for a moment the idea that it might be land raised a flicker of hope, which was only to give way to deep disappointment and uneasiness—if it was not land, what could it be?

Soon the islands became so numerous that they formed a continous carpet of weed over the whole surface of the sea as far as the eye could reach, and the Admiral kept straight ahead, while the crew cried out, in God's holy name, and implored the helmsman to fall off. Too late, they were already in the midst of the green, and look! she could sail through it without losing so very much of her way—for the present. But supposing the masses of weed got denser and they ended by sticking fast in them? That it was a sort of seaweed the Admiral convinced them all by having some of it fished up; but not any known kind of weed, and how could it grow here, how did it come here, many many leagues from land?

They need not be too sure that they were so very far

from land, suggested the Admiral, sanguine of course as usual, and putting on a bold face just when the others looked blackest. But where could this land be? At any rate it was not to be seen for miles ahead or on either side, only a boundless pale-green expanse of tufted water with a false promise of meadows—so deceptive indeed that many believed in them. Might it not be supposed that sunken countries or submarine realms lay underneath here, from which all this grass had come loose and floated up? In that case it was dangerous: there must be shoals, at any moment they might run aground, and stranding so far from any coast would mean death. The Admiral's only reply to these complaints was to have soundings taken, and the lead ran out for hundreds of fathoms, all the line they had, and no bottom! If the pastures they were talking about lay below, then he must say they were a long way down; and the Admiral was cruel enough to add that *now* nobody would be likely to expect a cow to stick its head out of the sea from the meadows below or to see a church spire jutting out. Loud cries of pain drowned his words; the men were thrown from fright into terror. So deep! Why, there was no bottom at all here! So they *were* outside the world now and over the inconceivable abyss of Ocean. They had to prop each other up at the thought, and their eyes nearly dropped out of their heads. To be wrecked here, to sink and sink and sink. . . . But the Admiral asked them rather dryly if it wouldn't be all the same to them how much water they drowned in, a fathom or a mile, if it had to be: a heartless thing to say, and incautious. They roared—one man threw his cap at him. The Admiral turned his back on them, but came again and pointed with a great sweep of the arm out over the sea of weed that shone like gold in the dazzling rays of

the sun: if they believed that all this splendour came from impossible submarine islands, then it was *his* belief that it was a presage of real islands, perhaps not so very far off, where the golden fields extended just as far as the seaweed here—floors of gold far and wide! And then they made a fuss like a pack of women over the trouble and risk of getting there—as if the islands wouldn't have been discovered and occupied long ago if there had been no danger in it!

Silence, not a sound; some of them were put to shame, others led into a new train of thought—it sounded wonderful, that about the gold. And the end of it was that they went on sailing; while bandying words they easily did a half-day's run. But the men stuck to their opinion. They passed through the weed right enough, but all the same it was an ominous sign that the sea was getting so thick. What if it thickened still more? They might sail in gruel, but in porridge any man would stick fast. And the Admiral's words had left a sting behind them: if he had more learning, it didn't give him the right to make fun of poor Christian men.

If, however, there were lamentations over the danger of getting stuck in the sea of weed, it was not long before the fact of their slipping so easily through it gave uneasiness. What would be the end of it? This everlasting breeze from the north-east! Why, it held for weeks, they never touched the sails, which stood day and night on the starboard tack, easy sailing, but what about it when they had to go the other way? How would they come home again? What kind of a wind was it anyhow? It had never been reported anywhere else that the wind held so long from one quarter; it could scarcely be interpreted otherwise than that there was a sucking from the opposite

quarter, the one they were making for, like the wind that goes over a waterfall; it was from the *Abyss* the sucking came, they were in it now, and it was a desperate thing, it was tempting God and throwing away one's fair wind, which was of the kind the Evil One sends . . . etc., etc.

The Admiral shrugged his shoulders. Truth to tell, he did not understand himself why the wind held so long; it was a new thing in his experience, and every day he scanned the clouds and all other indications a seaman stores in his head and recognizes on later occasions; but these waters were strange to him, and nobody as yet could know how it was with this wind. There was every reason to be grateful for it though, if the crew had not been growing more anxious every day and scarcely to be managed in the long run.

Then it happened one day, the 23rd of September, that the wind changed, they had a head-sea, and the crew could no longer maintain that there were no other winds in these seas but from the north-east; Columbus was saved for another space, and he it was who clasped his hands that evening in deepest gratitude to the All-bountiful, in spite of the fact that they had made no headway that day.

In his private meditations, divided between the Bible and the log-book, he could not help thinking that evening of Moses, who led his refractory people through so many real dangers, but whose most difficult task was to preserve them from their own imagination and instinct of self-destruction.

But all the complaints returned with renewed force when the wind changed again; once more every one could clearly see that all the waves were hurrying to the west, the whole

sea was flowing that way, straight into the Abyss!

They now passed out of the Sargasso Sea, out into clear deep waves again, and if lately they had eyed the hated weed with furtive looks of woe, they now cast back inconsolable glances after it. For all the signs of land the Admiral had fabricated with his ready tongue while it was there, were vanished now. That seaweed showed the proximity of a coast had sounded right enough; but now? That crabs which they had found in the weed were a good sign, that birds and fish they had seen, which found food in it, also pointed to the nearness of land, of course—but now it was days ago, and still there was no land!

The men's heads were beginning to get a little addled: they saw sea monsters in every wave that curled, and huddled together in groups at night, afraid of the dark; they wept over the increasing heat, which left no doubt that they were approaching the scorching regions in the immediate neighbourhood of the sun, where nothing can live, except salamanders; they would not escape with being turned as dark as the blackamoors in Africa, they would be completely charred, scorched up like flies, the whole ship would blaze up—in the name of the most merciful God, man, turn about before it is too late!

Other voices made themselves heard, and those of the soberest men on board, the officers themselves. The bottom could be seen of the ship's provisions, in a literal sense; in several places they had gone down through the cargo to the bottom of the ship; if they were to count on food for the same number of days back as they had sailed out, they would have to turn pretty soon. To this Columbus said nothing. In his own mind he looked forward to the hour when they no longer *could* turn back, when their food was exhausted to that extent; then there would be

no other way than straight ahead, but he didn't say this.

The other complaints he took up, rather glad to be able to keep them alive, so that they might overshadow thoughts of the provisions; he went through them again with the crew, as often and as long as they liked, talking and talking, hollow-eyed, stiff with fatigue but indefatigable. It ended in a sort of permanent ship's parliament on board, where all, even the ordinary seamen, had a voice, and where the tone grew sharper and sharper. During these discussions all the theoretical side of the voyage was probed deeper and deeper, a kind of cross-examination which the Admiral accepted in good part, and which he spun out with a certain warmth, keeping an inner eye on the log the whole time.

All that Columbus had adduced again and again for fourteen years, before a commission of scholars in Portugal, and before a learned commission at Salamanca, had to come up, and he had to listen to the same arguments against him and refute them again as well as he could. Now how did he think he would reach the Indies by this crazy route which took him farther and farther away from them every day he sailed?

To put it briefly, if the earth was round . . .

Yes, but the earth wasn't round! Everybody knew that, everybody could see it, and it was heresy to assert the contrary, high treason against the Church and against God. Juan de la Cosa, who was the owner of the vessel and accompanied the exposition in that capacity, here acted as spokesman and displayed no mean biblical knowledge. Neither the Pentateuch nor the Prophets nor the Apostles said anything about the earth being a globe; besides, ordinary common sense told you it was an error; take the Deluge, for instance, how would it have been possible if

the earth was not flat? all the water would have run off if it had been curved . . .

Storms of applause from the whole crew for Juan de la Cosa, who modestly withdrew into the crowd, and a malicious chorus of yelping at Columbus.

But now the Admiral took to both Latin and Greek against Juan de la Cosa, quoted utterances of St. Augustine and compared them with things Aristotle had said, Strabo, Seneca, Pythagoras, Eratosthenes . . .

Aristotle . . . Juan de la Cosa nodded manfully, he had heard the name before, and knew that it carried weight, but he was not sure of his ground and the Admiral was given a chance of quoting at length all the reasons that had induced the ancients to assume the spherical form of the earth, the shadow it cast on the moon in an eclipse, the weightiest of proofs, which passed over the heads of the crew like the wildest moonshine. Juan de la Cosa, however, had understood it and came forward with an objection:

How was it possible that the earth cast a shadow on the moon, *even* if it was round? In that case the sun would have to pass right round the earth, *under* it so to speak . . .

COLUMBUS: That is just what it does.

JUAN DE LA COSA: Oh, I see. But then the earth must rest upon something, whether it is flat or round, a foundation; how can a heavenly body pass under that?

COLUMBUS: The earth has no foundation; it is a globe hanging freely in space.

Sensation. Suppressed passion here and there. All eyes hung upon Juan de la Cosa, who was quite distressed and looked at the Admiral with genuine sorrow, as he asked in a faltering voice how . . . how . . . the earth,

weighing many hundred thousand quintals . . . hang freely in space, how could that be?

What is impossible to Almighty God? answered the Admiral with force. He who has set the spheres in motion and keeps them going, with sun, moon and stars to give light and measure the day, should He not be able to keep the earth suspended in its place in space? *He* alone knows how!

Juan de la Cosa bowed his head and his forefinger went up to his breast, the sign of the cross made itself at the mention of the holy name of God. The crew followed his example, they felt as if they were in church, and the threatening conflict of opinion was resolved in a moment of solemn awe.

But the dispute blazed up again, and Juan de la Cosa obstinately insisted, on behalf of all, that *even* if the earth was round, which it was *not;* nay, even if it hung freely in space, by the power of God, whose name be praised, then it was nevertheless an impossible thing they were trying to do. A globe *might* be so big that to us men it would appear to be flat in that part where one was situated, granted, and that must necessarily be the upper part; but if one left it, one would have to proceed along a slope which would get steeper and steeper, vertical at last, and then turn inward on the under side, always supposing that the spherical theory held, which, of course, was sheer nonsense, for how could water hang on a globe all the way round?

Applause. *Bravo! bravo!* they cried to Juan de la Cosa; and he was really brave, he looked the Admiral straight in the face as, with a bow to his superior, he resumed his place in the crowd.

The last question the Admiral left alone and seized on the first, pounced on it like a hawk:

We are sailing *downward* at this moment!

Pause, until his meaning dawned on them, then violent excitement; several men shrieked aloud and ran to the bulwarks to look, some instinctively laid hand on hilt. Juan de la Cosa turned pale, but pulled himself together and asked:

And how did the Admiral think of sailing upward again?

Everybody grasped at once the bearing of Juan de la Cosa's words, pictured the immense curve down which they were engaged in sailing, saw the impossibility of ever coming up it again and stood as though turned to stone . . .

In the midst of this consternation the Admiral was heard to laugh, a perfectly careless laugh at such a serious moment; he was making fun of them, the hell-hound, the cup was full, they wouldn't listen to him any more . . .

We are sailing *upward* also at this moment, said the Admiral mildly to Juan de la Cosa, and explained his meaning more precisely; if the earth was really round there could be neither up nor down at any given point, except in the direction that passed through the centre of the earth and the zenith . . . But Juan de la Cosa shook his head, gave the Admiral an honest look and shook his head, grieved for him, for his ship and for them all.

The Admiral then changed his tone, laughed with his cavernous eyes, and made as though he accepted the others' view, since they were in the majority; suppose they were right and the earth was flat. But in that case it could not be surrounded by an abyss down which the water plunged, for then the seas would long ago have run off the earth, the

Deluge would have been impossible, as Juan de la Cosa very rightly pointed out. If on the other hand the Ocean lay about the earth in a ring, the common conception, it by no means precluded the idea of sailing westward to the Indies, round behind instead of straight ahead, not on a globe but on a circle, half-way round the earth's disc, if they preferred it that way . . .

Chorus of all hands that Juan de la Cosa was right, angry exclamations against the Admiral for evidently trying to obscure the heart of the matter and avoid Juan de la Cosa's direct question: how were you to sail up the curve of the earth again, when once you had had the mad idea of sailing down it? Out with it!

THE ADMIRAL: Now it was *they* who all believed that the earth was round!

Yells and bawling, cries of shame and general howls; and so the lesson came to an end.

In a succeeding one the Admiral had to produce all his reasons and proofs of the existence of land westward in the Ocean, apart from the cosmic ones; an argument they had heard before and that every man in Spain and Portugal had heard before, until they cried for help at the very sight of Columbus; an old trite lesson which he actually repeated for positively the last time, in fluent Spanish but with an accent that betrayed the Italian. In other circumstances than these, where their lives were at stake, they would have taken a wild delight in him, a glorious fool to have on board, all the more glorious as he was so big, so tall and so touched in the upper storey; had they not hated him as they did they might even have pitied him, alone against all, far out at sea, doubly alone as a stranger among strangers, this queer fish who was getting old and made

himself a laughing-stock by repeating and repeating, explaining and dogmatizing about the same things over and over again—

Such as: From time immemorial ["Time immemorial . . ." Diego mimicked him, with Italian accent, discreet tone and all; aside, of course, but loud enough to amuse his neighbours]—from time immemorial there had been reports of a vanished land out in the Atlantic Ocean, Plato's Atlantis; opinions were divided as to whether it had been swallowed up by the sea or the way to it had been forgotten; the latter view was supported by rumours repeated through the ages of such lands or islands far to the west of Europe. Many were of the opinion that these were Paradise itself, the Lost Country, from which mankind had once been driven out and had never found the way back; the holy Brandanus had set out in search of them and had actually arrived at a happy isle in the Ocean, the abode of the Blest, as might be read in his legend; but since then the way had been lost again, it was eight hundred years since St. Brandan's voyage. The legend had afterwards been connected with the Canary Isles, wrongly of course; the islands must lie much farther out in the Ocean, at least twice as far as the Azores, which were also out of the question, and presumably more to the southward, possibly in the very direction in which they were now sailing.

Now it was to be remarked that in another, more recent view the legend of these mysterious islands or continents far far to the west might be regarded as obscure but substantially correct reports of the east coast of India, which extended so far around the earth that perhaps there had been contact with it now and then by the other way, straight across the Atlantic. It was known that very large islands

lay off the coast of India, like Zipangu, of which Marco Polo had sufficiently trustworthy accounts; these must then be the same as the Antilia or the Island of Brazil which the latest geographers, in anticipation of their discovery, had already marked on their maps, as for example the most learned and famous Toscanelli ["What kind of a fool was he?" from Diego], and as the distance between the west coast of Europe and the extremity of India was more or less known, the width of the Atlantic, that is, the distance to be deducted from the whole circumference of the earth, could be approximately determined; in the Admiral's opinion it was neither more nor less than the distance they had already sailed, so now the islands might appear any day [scornful snorts from Diego and the rest of the audience; how often they had heard this sanguine irresponsible tale!]

Well, well, if the geographical arguments were no more obvious to them than the cosmic, then they had the direct, tangible proofs, the missives to be taken up and felt which from time to time had been brought by the Atlantic and which must point to there being land on the other side. In the first place there were the reports of many people who had *seen* the islands, on very clear days, out in the ocean to the west of the Canary Isles ["Long-sighted people, I must say"—Diego]; that was as it might be. Personal evidence: Columbus himself many years before in Madeira had given shelter to a ship-wrecked man who disclosed to him on his deathbed that he had been driven by a storm twenty-eight days out into the Atlantic on a voyage to England, and had there come upon islands the natives of which went about naked; afterwards he had got a fair wind back to Europe but was so worn out that he died in Madeira, the last of a crew of seventeen ["A nice story

that! Why didn't he stay in the islands? Weren't they worth it?"]

There was Pedro Correa ["Oh, *that* fellow"] who was able to tell Columbus about a remarkable piece of driftwood that had come ashore at Porto Santo, a curiously dark wood and, be it noted, carved, though apparently not with iron tools. Still more remarkable: some big reeds had drifted up on the same shore, like a sort of grass on an extraordinarily large scale, almost as though they came from a country where everything was of supernatural size. ["Let's see them!"] Columbus himself might have had a chance of seeing them washed up with his own eyes; he had spent three years in Porto Santo and had himself observed many things there which indirectly pointed to lands in the west, curious cloud formations and appearances of the sky, on which, however, he would not lay stress. The reeds, on the other hand, had been sent to the King of Portugal, and there he had *seen* them. Martin Vincenti, a seaman worthy of credit ["I'd like to have him here"—Diego], had also found carved driftwood far to the west of Cape St. Vincent.

But the most remarkable of all proofs was that reported from the Azores: there after westerly winds they had found boats washed up on the beach, hollowed out of a single trunk, evidently the craft of savages; and on Flores, one of the Azores, two corpses had been washed up, possibly these same savages; they were broad in the face and did not resemble any known race of men. This one might almost call tangible proof of the existence of the Antipodes . . .

The Antipodes . . . here Juan de la Cosa coughed and ventured an observation. To a sober view the finding of the two corpses, if the account was to be relied upon, did

not appear to him to convey any information about the Antipodes, since from what one knew about them they must have an entirely different appearance, scarcely confined to such a trifle as greater breadth of face. In the nature of things nothing definite could be known about the Antipodes, but it was obvious that beings who were to inhabit the under side of the earth, where the trees grew downward and the rain fell straight up in the air, must at any rate have suckers on their feet, like certain kinds of lizards, to stay where they were; in other respects also they were doubtless very different from Christians. It was not necessary indeed to go so far as the earth's poles or supports to find monsters; even in the heathen world, towards the outskirts of the earth, there was a great falling-off from the human form, if one might believe travellers and writings whose age entitled them to veneration. Not that he was himself a man of great reading, but still he had heard of the Arimaspians and of the Satyrs and knew that beyond Arabia there were people with only one leg, on which they hopped around, and that very swiftly; that there were Amazons and men without a head but with a face in their stomach was also known. From this it appeared that the farther one travelled from the Christian world, the more men ceased to be created in God's image, and there seemed to be good grounds for supposing that those who dwelt farthest down were created in the image of quite another Person, if indeed one might include the Devil in Creation; in which case they had wings and were to that extent capable of keeping on the under side of the earth. Instead of supposing Paradise to lie in that quarter it was more natural to imagine Hell there, even to an unenlightened view, since there was every reason to presume that the earth rested on fire or had fire in its depths, as could be

seen by volcanoes; the fact that it grew hotter and hotter the farther one sailed to the south was an indication in the same direction, as all those present were in a position to confirm. Thus the two corpses at the Azores, in Juan de la Cosa's humble layman's opinion, did not tell them much about the Antipodes. The mention of them, on the other hand, suggested quite other and horrible ideas to the mind.

An uncanny silence fell upon the crew at Juan de la Cosa's rational words. Of course, the Admiral always made it appear to them that the only goal of their desires was to sight land, but it depended a good deal on what awaited them when they did reach land. Speechless resentment against the Admiral was reflected in their features at the thought of what Juan de la Cosa had pictured; they could not find words for their horror and abomination. Was it possible that he intended and had been intending all the time to sail them straight into Hell? Were they to lose their salvation as well as their lives? Had he sold their souls? Then let the Devil take him . . . The oath stuck in their throats, for if he was the foul fiend himself . . .

Ugly pause. Even Jorge, the wholly inarticulate, who sat on deck poking bits of salt pork into his mouth with his knife and audibly pulling the blade out again between his teeth, an old galley slave with scars on his ankles from the shackles and bare places on his scalp like an old horse chafed by the harness—even he gave an *Ouf!* and raised his pock-marked face, shaking a little with age, blinked and cocked his ear: What now, what made the men so quiet? Unwholesome air, he had always found, when abuse died away on men's lips! Could there be worse things in store for him than he had already gone through, in his long, precarious life?

But Jorge was quickly reassured and shoved in another mouthful that had been checked in the air on the point of his knife, for the Admiral was evidently saying things that restored the men's breath and gave them back the use of speech: the Admiral crossed himself so frankly and feelingly for his own part at the mention of the Evil One and his abode that only the most grudging could doubt his piety; assuredly *he* was not in league with the Prince of Fire, far less was he that personage himself, so much would have to be admitted.

A protracted exchange of opinions ensued on difficult theological problems. The Admiral did not hold the view that the Underworld was a place which could be reached by any known route, at any rate not by sea; that was out of the question, since water was an element hostile and opposed to fire; the way thither was inaccessible to man, while alive; for such as died without grace it was easy to find. Paradise, on the other hand, which was commonly placed in Heaven, without more precise indication . . . well, they had no priest on board, but even in the absence of one the holy articles of faith and the revelation of the Scriptures should remain entirely undisturbed; however, even the Scriptures gave nothing that one might call a definite observation of the position of the Kingdom of Heaven; but as we were told that our first parents were driven from thence it was permissible to suppose that it had lain and still lay somewhere on earth. In contradistinction to the Underworld we had an example in Holy Writ that men might be taken up alive into Heaven, the prophet Elijah; although this happened a long time ago it could not therefore be regarded as absolutely impossible that it might take place again.

Shaking of heads among the Admiral's hearers, divided

opinions and an uncomfortable feeling in their insides; as usual, the talk had an inconclusive, unsatisfied ending. To many whose sole unhappy thought was their abandonment in the midst of Ocean, the future appeared in a doubtful, hopeless light; in truth, with all the various prospects suggested by the officers, the cry of *Land* could not come soon enough!

When at last it came, however, it swept aside all other thoughts . . .

Land, land!

It was from Martin Alonzo Pinzon the blessed cry came. He had just closed the flagship in the *Pinta*, a comparison had been made of logs and charts, apparently of a disquieting nature, when Martin Alonzo noticed something like a low cloud or indication of land ahead to the westward, right in the sunset, a long way off, but with so unmistakably the character of a long, broken coast-line that Martin Alonzo was not in doubt for a moment:

Land! land!

They all saw it, the Admiral saw it and immediately fell on his knees on the quarter-deck and began to thank God with hands raised high. Immense sensation, all troubles forgotten, wild joy all over the ship at the sight of the distant blessed streak of land; the men ran up the masts and down again, fell into each other's arms, were quite beside themselves.

Ay, a mad scene of confusion, until the Admiral in a powerful, solemn voice which penetrated from one end of the ship to the other, ordered all hands to be called on deck for divine service.

A gun was fired, and the *Niña* sailed up; the three ships sailed abreast in the falling darkness, and as the streak of

land vanished in the great glow of the sunset, and the afterglow paled away and gave place to the first tiny twinkling stars, the hymn arose from the *Santa Maria*, from the *Pinta* and the *Niña*, three choirs of men's voices which united in one and cried out upon the sea and to the stars:

Salve Regina, Mater misericordiæ, vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus exsules, filii Hevæ.
Ad te suspiramus, gementes, et flentes in hoc lacrymarum valle.
Eia ergo advocata nostra, illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte.
Et Jesum benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exsilium ostende.
O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria.

IV

SAN SALVADOR

NEVER had any night been so long, never any expectation so tense. Course was altered to south-west, the direction in which land had been sighted, and was kept all night in the fresh breeze.

But when the sun rose astern of them it exposed an ocean entirely bare as far as the eye could see; ahead, where the land had been sighted, there was only the sharp line where the distant empty sky met the distant edge of the sea and the waves ran together like snakes, a blue wilderness above and below, on every side!

The disappointment was hardly to be borne. With sinking hearts they realized that what they had taken for land had only been a mirage, a cruel sport with the hopes of poor hard-tried men. Could there be more trials in store?

A voice was heard, after some time of deathlike silence; a man went about among the hopeless ones trying to talk, to talk up his spirits, hopeless himself—the Admiral. Nobody listened to him, he scarcely had the heart to believe his own words, but something had to be said.

Speaking half to himself he explained dejectedly that what they had seen could be nothing else but St. Brandan's Isle, for it was known from his legend to be a movable island, which changed its place in the sea, a wandering isle, so to speak. St. Brandan had sailed after it for days without being able to overtake it; it continued to move on before him in the sea, just like an airy vision; but he had

reached it at last, and in reality it was a mercy they had sighted it, a proof that it existed, and with God's help they too would reach it . . .

They turned from him in disgust, with forlorn looks, turned eyes like blazing coals on him, malice and impotence in one, like captive cats, they looked him up and down, this chattering old map-maker and impostor, Admiral of the Moon, with his Saints and his fine connections and his worn-out shoes; they gazed after him, curling their upper lips and baring their teeth, hating his back, the hair on his neck, his huge size, an advantage which of course the vagabond must have stolen. And the Admiral went up alone to his quarter-deck and stayed there, while the ship beneath him sank into the dull despair of a fasting morning.

It was on the 25th of September that they made the false landfall; its result was to impair the spirits both of the commander and of the crew. And there was still two weeks' sailing before them.

How did he get them to do it? How was it possible after they had suffered this collapse of all hope? It even repeated itself: once more there was a cry of land, and they believed it; another disappointment. He got them to do it.

The situation on board had changed greatly for the worse; for a time all communication between the poop and the main deck was broken off. The school on deck and the Admiral's long, kindly explanations were things of the past; he stayed aft and paced his watch, night and day, no wonder his shoes were worn out; and down on deck the crew behaved as though there was nobody in command at all, so far as their part of the ship was concerned.

They were still sailing, the westerly course was resumed, but the crew held meetings on their own account, put their

heads together in groups here and there, groups which at first were not altogether in agreement, with many opinions and proposals, though none in the Admiral's favour. Diego could be seen, lively and active, with his black head showing up now in one group, now in another, with violent gestures and a programme which he hammered in with bated breath, point by point, one hand striking the other.

It was mutiny that had at last begun to take shape. Diego saw blood and felt the tingling stiffness in his legs that precedes a spring; the Admiral appeared to his imagination like a bull in a cloud of dust, his nerves egged him on to get at it, though he was only a pygmy compared with the monster—to jump over it, literally, right in front of its horns, stick blazing darts into it, tease it by twisting its tail, and finally drive a yard of steel through its shoulder right down to the heart.

Thus it was with Diego, who always wanted the theatrical, a show for the eye; others looked at the matter more soberly. The Admiral was to be got out of the way, without too much exposure or obvious guilt on the part of those who were the means of doing it. Accidents may always happen, man overboard; the Admiral was up at night measuring the stars with his eyes on the sky, right against the low rail; he might lose his footing and go head first into the sea, nobody could tell how, and he himself would never be required to explain it. Then they would sorrowfully return home without an admiral . . .

Here, however, was a point which caused a fairly sharp difference of opinion, the groups nearly came to loggerheads over it: would they be able to find the way home without him? Those passably skilled in seamanship thought there would be no trouble about it, a long beat against the wind, several weeks, months perhaps, tacking

to north and south, seeing how badly the ships worked to windward; but how else could the Admiral himself have thought of getting back when the time came? Others wrinkled their foreheads and made no attempt to conceal what could not be concealed, that the Admiral, in spite of all his intolerable idiosyncrasies, undoubtedly possessed remarkable powers, supernatural powers one might even call them; something more than ordinary knowledge of the sea was wanted, he had secrets which he would take with him to the grave, and perhaps it was as well to be wary of getting in one's own way by removing him.

A few men flatly refused to conspire against the Admiral —Pedro Gutierrez, whose hands were too white; Juan de la Cosa too, to the general regret, he would have been a good man to have on their side. But Juan de la Cosa, who had never for an instant believed in the voyage and was now more incredulous than ever, declared that in spite of all he would lay his bones where Columbus laid his; this was such a mad enterprise that life would seem poor to him if he did not see it out—something to be said for that, but it was not a comrade's point of view.

Thus opinions were divided until one of them gained the upper hand and sentence of death was passed.

The explosion came, but it was the Admiral himself who brought it about, just as the plan was ripe. He had long seen what was in the wind, and one day when all hands were on deck, groups and meetings in the greatest excitement, he came down from the poop right amongst them, unarmed, determined to have a talk with them.

Cries of rage greeted him as he came down the ladder; in an instant the deck was in an uproar, every man of one mind, no mercy for him, and if he came of his own accord

to meet his death so much the better! A cat-like spring, and a blade caught the light, it was Diego at the head of mob; a scuffle, he and the Admiral hand to hand, a whirlwind nobody could follow . . .

But they saw the upshot. The Admiral had hold of Diego, however he had managed it, held him fast and broke the rapier in his hand, taking the pieces from him; and while holding him with one hand he grasped his forearm with the other and gave him two blows on the ear with his own hand, then swept him aside with his flat palm, with a twitch of the face as when one gets rid of a foul insect. And then Columbus rose and faced the mob . . .

Diego's imagination had not been altogether wrong in regarding him as a bull, for now in his anger there was something bull-like about him, the big head, the snorting nostrils, the attitude; he swelled, the blood went to his head till his eyes showed white against the blue skin, he hunched himself and struck out with his mighty arms as though he would jerk them out of his shoulders, snort after snort came from his nose and all his hair bristled and made him still more terrible, the thunderbolt was in his hand, his voice came in a huge roar. And then he gave them his mind:

Here he was to lead them into kingdoms their eyes had never seen, and by the living God, whether they liked it or not, they should see them! Never should the rabble say of him that he had failed his royal lord and master King Ferdinand of Spain and his Queen Isabella, in whose service he had sailed; never should any force hinder him in his duty! He was a seaman before God and Our Lady, appointed by Heaven to bring grace to the heathen, even if he had to sail to the uttermost sea! So long as there were souls in darkness who had not heard the gospel and

received the offer of grace, so long would he sail, to the world's end, a mortal only, but an instrument in the hand of Almighty God for eternity. Who was strong enough to stop him on his way?

He looked around with the eyes of a wild boar among hounds. But not one of them made a sound.

His expression changed to one of sorrow, there was a quiver in his beard, and the giant fell into terrible weeping, turned and hid his face in his arm, staggering like a blind man towards the ladder. A broader target for a crossbow-bolt than his back as he went up to the poop could not have been desired, but now he went scot-free, the hands of all on deck hung limply by their sides. They saw him go into the little cabin aft and close the door after him, like an unhappy man who wished to be alone. And there were some among them whose eyes blinked in their trouble; perhaps after all there had been *too* many of them baiting the giant! Some saw that his hands were bleeding after the encounter with Diego.

Not a word passed among those who stayed on deck. But the men who took their turn at the helm that day steered so carefully, with all their attention fixed on the compass, the course due west.

Those who had noticed the Admiral's worn-out shoes noticed again, in a day or two, that they had been mended. Who could have done it? Was it one of the crew perhaps who had taken upon himself to sew them up early in the morning while the Admiral was asleep? Or had the Admiral done it himself by the little chart-house lantern whose light always shone from his cabin at night?

On they went, in the invariable, mystical wind which seemed to have some mysterious purpose with them; but

there was no fair-wind feeling on board, their minds were dark and rankling like the doomed. Signs interpreted as showing the nearness of land came and went, awaking, after their bitter experience, a hope which had no strength and which left traces of a yet deeper affliction in their furrowed faces.

The crew began to lose the fixed notions about the world with which they had set out, they had forgotten Spain, forgotten almost who they were; the world appeared to them in an uncertain light as an enchantment which was already acting upon them, they were in other states of being, would not have been surprised if one day the roc had swooped down and carried off one of the ships in its claws; sea monsters lurked beneath them—that they saw none almost seemed an added unreality.

The quarrel between the crew and the Admiral blazed up again frequently, but was of a barren, disconsolate nature; the crew were too dull to plot together any more and had come to hate each other to an extent that made all common action impossible. It had gone with them as it goes with every collection of men confined in the same place, without women, without a chance of avoiding one another, a repulsion scarcely to be borne. They opened their mouths at each other in loathing, without uttering a word, gaped at each other like sick and sorry beasts of prey, even language was too heavy to lift; they turned their backs on each other as far as might be, got out of each other's way in the narrow ship, climbed out on the bowsprit and enjoyed a few fathoms' distance from the rest and a good long solitary cry, riding astride the spar with their arms round a thin rope; they hid out of sight among the cargo, up on the yard, hanging overboard by a line on the ship's side, like a man hung up for curing—anywhere

if they could only escape the sight of one another. Ah, the voyage and the long companionship punished them by letting them see themselves as they were!

All discipline went to pieces, there was just enough of it left for navigating the ship, not that that was much trouble in the fine weather; the ship was like a kennel where you stumbled over meat bones, the men slept where they dropped, scratched themselves where they felt a bite, growled without opening their eyes when they were trodden on. On days when their spirits revived—when birds had been seen or other reminders of a world long ago abandoned and vanished which they had once known, or when the Admiral had been talking about land again like an automaton, the idiot above them, to whom they had grown accustomed as one does to a voice—on such occasions they took omens, a wearisome pastime during which the life ebbed out of them: if a certain cockroach, which they saw sitting still in a certain spot, ran a certain way when it did run, then they would sight land before evening. God help the man who prodded the cockroach and disturbed the divine judgment, or came near it; mad roars scared away any who wanted to approach the group where the trial was taking place; it might last for hours if it was a very sedate cockroach. If at last it ran, why then they would either sight land before evening, which would simply turn out a lie, or it ran the wrong way and all hope was gone, as it was anyhow.

Those of the crew who retained a remnant of humanity retired into themselves and became pious, clutched the crucifix, not now and then but continuously, had it in their hands night and day and moistened it with tears; pictures of the Virgin Mary were kissed as long as they would stand it, pious vows were made. All the pilgrimages they would

undertake if they ever saw Spain again! In hair shirt, barefooted! No thought of expense in the matter of candles. Some promised the Virgin a stone of them, a whole stone! Could she hold out against that? Though innocent of any such intention, it gave a pretty good idea of what the giver was worth. But the whole was of no avail.

Away aft the Admiral paced his heavy beat like an ox in its stall, always the same weight, the heavy step that made the planks give under it and was felt all over the ship, a brutish, intolerable endurance. His shoes had burst again under his bull-like tread. The Admiral was all hair and beard, his face more inscrutable than ever before—couldn't he reckon his log by the amount of hair that grew on him?

This was just the sore point, the Admiral's own inner vexation, which of course he concealed from every one: there was something wrong with his calculations of distance. The length of the voyage to India as he had estimated it beforehand and the distance they had covered did not by any means agree, the Atlantic Ocean appeared to be a good deal wider than he had imagined—if it had any end. What was he to believe?

To begin with, the crew had been terrified that they might burst through the sky if they went on sailing, and have the pieces tumbling about them and fall into God knows what calamities outside, a superstition which they no longer entertained—oh no, it did not seem even that there *was* any world's end, it was nothing but sailing and sailing, without any actual catastrophe but at the same time without cessation, till Doomsday perhaps. Who could tell whether they were not already damned and would have to go on sailing, for having presumptuously tampered with the locks of the Ocean; perhaps they were already in

eternity and could not die, but would see each other for ever, be shipmates together for all ages, ugh! and sail and sail and sail.

And the flesh would fall from their faces, and they would look upon one another as bare death's-heads but unable to die; and the *Santa Maria* would become an old ship, old as she was already, with splintered deck, sun-bleached sails and frayed ropes like prickly worms, the anchor scaly with rust; but she could not die either, the old tub would plough the infinite to all eternity and rock with her chafed spars and groan in her timbers and gather slimy seaweed at the waterline, and sail, ho, ho, ho, until some day Satan—if not God, who had forgotten her—took pity and opened a vent-hole down in Hell to receive the rotten old wreck!

And yet he pressed on, Columbus, persisted daily in romancing in his cautious voice about the signs of land, until they clasped their hands and begged the monster to stop, begged him to kick them and let them die; still he pottered about with his astrolabes and angles and hushed up to-day what he had expatiated on with criminal optimism yesterday, when it proved to be humbug.

If only they had thrown him overboard that time, when it was not too late and they had it in them to rise! He even grudged them their food now, for all his fatherly talk; they were on rations, the junk was eaten up or gone bad, vermin in what was left; at night the rats ran over them, some day they would have to eat *them*, like heathen dogs, unless it was the other way about; the water was rotten, might he but poison himself with it pretty soon so that they could be rid of his creaking about the deck and be able to lie in peace and close their eyes to the next man's disgusting dirty features, and die.

The heat increased, the heat increased. O dear! O dear!

And then, when they were at their lowest, an asylum in the extremity of moral dissolution, hope began to trickle in, for a long while against their will, for it only came in the shape of the old, hateful, torturing twaddle about signs of land, and the more they had of it the more it worried them. But at last they could not help beginning to see for themselves.

One morning early in October they heard the Admiral singing up on the poop, entirely alone with his God and the sunrise, and they understood that now he was confident, not with a world of hopefulness in his mouth and sick inside, as they had known him so long, for after all they had some sense—his conviction was genuine now. And soon they could do nothing but share it. In the course of that day and the succeeding ones, up to the 11th, the evidences of the proximity of land increased so fast that nobody could be in doubt any longer. They recovered as the sick recover, without any vital strength at first, but rich in the soul; quiet tears ran down their cheeks—no, now there was no doubt!

On the 7th of October the Admiral altered course to the south-west. For several days before they had seen birds, pelicans, but that day they saw great flocks of birds flying from north to south-west. Columbus knew that the Portuguese had found land by sailing after the flight of birds, and he followed their example. His supposition was that they had now passed the islands he expected to find in the Ocean, or had sailed through them without sighting them. He therefore thought he would sail straight on to the mainland; the islands they could always come back to. On the 11th the signs of land were certain: the crew of the *Pinta*

fished up a carved log from the water; from the *Niña* they even saw a fresh bough with berries on it in the sea, and were reminded of the dove with the olive leaf in its beak which returned to Noah's Ark after the Deluge; stormy petrels were seen, and that day they sailed in a rising wind and a fairly rough sea, answering to the strength of the conviction that drove them on and the uneasiness which accompanied the thought that very soon, a question of hours, they would see land.

But so late as the day before the Admiral had had to go through a final tussle with his men, impending mutiny, now, now, just as uncertainty was giving way to infallible signs. It was the probability of the approach of land, and nothing else, that raised the crew; they had recovered their strength with surprising rapidity when the world began to be like itself again, and now a flood of misgivings rushed in upon them. Without a doubt they were reaching land, but what sort of land? At the best, if it was India, it would be a gross piece of foolhardiness to fall upon the back-door of the Great Cham's realms with three wretched little ships and scarcely a hundred men; if the Admiral hadn't thought of it before it was time to think of it now and turn back; anyhow the situation had been determined and they could come again with a fleet and an army. They had agreed to join him in the reconnaissance and had borne the indescribable sufferings that pioneers have to undergo in new and unknown seas, but to cut the matter short they would now go home for reinforcements—no question of exposing themselves to be massacred on a hostile shore and wasting the whole voyage if not a single one of them returned to tell of it . . .

Only a hundred men, the Admiral interposed, but *Spaniards* . . .

Proud looks, chests thrown out, the Admiral was courteous, knew how to strike the right note. *But* . . . and then it all came over again, not without hints of who was in the majority and had the power and meant to use it. Shouts, Diego jumping out of the crowd like a leopard out of the jungle, beating the air with all his limbs, a chorus of roars behind him: *thus* far they had sailed the Admiral and made his fortune, now not a mile more!

It ended in the Admiral declaring in so many words that for his part he would continue the voyage until he had found India, according to his plan. He did not get excited this time, did not thunder over their heads; on the other hand, he let them have a taste of his scorn, which had a bitter smack to some at least among the crew; moreover there was a determination in his demeanour which made them see that they would have to cross his dead body ere there was any chance of turning back.

Thus he succeeded once more in dividing them: cries of revenge, threats and much harmless swearing in one quarter, silence and brooding in another: postponement, tension, troubled waves inboard and out, but sailing and good progress all the while. And the next day they were in a different humour. The absolutely certain signs of land carried all with them. The day's work on the 11th of October was a triumphal progress; the sun went down that evening in a waste of water, as it had done for thirty-five evenings before, but with a great red glow of mighty expectation to mark its setting.

The night of the 11th was a dark night; the moon, which was in its last quarter, would rise at eleven. It was about ten o'clock when the Admiral saw from the poop the first direct sign of land, a light ahead in the darkness which

moved up and down. Fire was the first sign of welcome that greeted him from the unknown shore, a gleam borne by a man's hand and swaying up and down with his walk. Columbus called Pedro Gutierrez, whom he trusted, up to him and asked if he saw the light, and when he had confirmed it he sent for Rodrigo Sanchez, the King's representative on board, that he might be a witness.

At two o'clock in the morning, when the moon was up, a sailor with good eyes on board the *Pinta* made out the coast-line ahead, Rodrigo de Triana was his name; the *Pinta* fired a gun as a salute, and as the other ships came up they could all distinguish the line of coast, a low-lying land ahead. Sails were taken in, the worn sails, stiff as boards in their clews from standing so long; only a few stitches of canvas were left set, enough to keep the ships moving up and down, more or less where they were; they had only to wait for morning.

What a night! Never before had men's minds been so wrought up by tension, triumph, fear of the unknown, curiosity, the sense of immense and fateful things. And no wonder; the time was now ripe for two worlds to meet here, with all that there was in them, to spread their fires one to the other and brand each other anew; hosts were to be let loose, and men's souls would not remain what they were, therefore the heart pumped so uproariously in every man's breast. All this they could not see, but it was in their veins as a great necessity: jubilation and festival spirit all through the long, sleepless, expectant night.

The night did not pass in idleness, a fever of preparation was everywhere. Some washed themselves in the waning moonlight against going ashore in the morning, others had their hair cut as well as could be managed, even the Admiral himself, whose hair and beard Pedro Gutierrez

cropped: it was strange what a comparatively small head he had when his mane was off. The grindstone shrieked under the forecastle, splashing in its trough: the crew were sharpening their swords in expectation of what the morrow might bring, running a sensitive thumb along the edge; they spat between hand and hilt and tried their grip, swung the blade till it whined in the air.

And their tongues went, volubly; loquacity did them good, giving vent to much that was in them; and thoughts were numbed that would have cramped their spirits, after all things had turned out as they should. The Admiral, he was now peerless, the man of the day, and they had shown it too in that mad hour when land was sighted and every one lost his head in a feeling of humanity and gratitude. Some had gone so far as to crawl to his feet along the deck on hands and knees and kiss the hem of his mantle, they had humbled themselves before him as before a deity, as was only fair on the part of those who had been the most impudent in opposing him during the voyage; others kept somewhat in the background, not wishing to recall their existence too prominently. For his own part the Admiral had been greatly moved and had clasped his hands in long speechless gratitude to his Creator, but apart from that it was remarkable how calmly he took his deliverance, really as though he had been quite certain all the time that it must come in this way.

And in this the men had to acknowledge that he was right; the thing was easy enough, nothing startling about it in reality, anybody could have done the same. Straight ahead, straight ahead, that was all, a course drawn with a ruler, with a turn at the end of it, neither storms, rocks, nor winding channels; straight across the ocean, thirty-five days' sail, what do you say to that? From the morrow he

would actually be Admiral, and Viceroy into the bargain, ts, ts—and when he came out in all his glory it would be seen where *those* were who after all had done the whole of the work on board, built the vessel, so to speak, and trimmed the sails and taken the helm, and had borne all the anxiety on the top of it! For *he* had shown practically no fear at all.

Many were the eyes as the night wore on which were fixed from time to time on the distant indistinct line of coast, rather low-lying, it seemed, not forbidding with lofty mountains or abrupt cliffs, easily mastered . . . now it remained to be seen who lived there. Oh, if they had neither sailed into the Abyss, nor had the sky falling about them, nor been drawn to the Magnet Mountain, nor burnt up by the sun, nor swallowed by sea monsters, it would turn out sure enough that the inhabitants were just ordinary human beings; in that case there would be no concealing the fact that here again the Admiral had solved a problem quite simple from the start.

Among those who gazed landward from the *Santa Maria* was a man with a thick lip; he had been so wanting in tact as to remind a shipmate of all the candles he had promised the Virgin Mary; like a flash he had got one on the mouth. . . . Was *he* the one to claim the candles? Scrimmage, and a black eye for his messmate; and thus it was that one of them gazed at the land with only one eye open.

Diego was singing somewhere in the darkness, up in his highest falsetto, crowing to himself like a lonely cock quail on a spring night. Who would there be for him among the sleepers over there, with her ear hot from dreaming? He would soon find that out; but even now, *now* she was there, sleeping beneath the same moon, long-

ing perhaps, like him, for what was to come—could she but know how near it was!

Up on the poop the Admiral walked with his diminished head and his great new dignity, which on the morrow he would bear ashore in fullest armour, with the banners of Castile. What were his thoughts? A deep surge of emotion filled him at the goodness and mercy of God. Great thoughts, possible and impossible, possessed him as the ship washed up and down, with the waves caressing her bow and her mastheads tracing letters among the stars; each time the ship went about the whole starry sky swung round upon itself; thus in the Admiral's head the world and all his thoughts revolved. What awaited him yonder?

The night was so mild and wonderful, the breeze had dropped and a land-air brought a warm scent out to seaward—many strange, spicy, obscure, powerful odours, of fire, mud, plants, the heavy night-sweat of the tropics that hangs out like a garment from land to sea, the ancient rank and pregnant scent of life.

What a life? The Admiral's head was swimming. For the last few days, which had carried them farther south, there had been a sort of forgotten and yet familiar soul in the air, a growing sense of summer, an atmosphere of rejuvenation, full of vanished summers, childhood's springtime, an eternal May, sky, air and sea reposing as it were perpetually in the Virgin's month . . . *could* it be imagined, was it possible that when day came he would be able to sail with his three ships into Paradise, the land of eternal summer, the land of youth, the abode of the Virgin Mary? *Would he see her?*

His breath failed him, he stood still, pulled himself together. It was not impossible. But it was not to be thought of until it came about, that was not lawful for a

man. In the course of the night the thought recurred, but he kept it down, forced himself to think of what was more reasonable and actual, that it was the coast of India he saw there dimly in the moonlight, or the islands off the mainland, probably Antilia, the Spice Islands, from which all precious things came, for the scent wafted out on the night proclaimed it to be an island full of spices and sweet-smelling things; for that matter it might well be the Abode of the Blest. But then surely it would show a greater light than the solitary torch he had seen?

And yet, was the perpetual lamp that burned before the image of the Virgin in the cathedral a great light? Did it not burn as a solitary spark in the midst of an ocean of darkness? How great was the light the shepherds saw shining from the inn that Christmas night when God's Mother wrapped her First-born in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger? The scent that was now wafted to him on the night airs from the island, the hearths ashore, of perfumed wood, it was the incense, the cathedral, and all it promised! He dared not follow his thoughts, their immensity inflamed him—was the Garden of Eden at hand? With an effort he forced them back into a human train.

By force he held himself to the conviction that it was Antilia he lay off, and thought over all that might be expected, and all that he would have to do.

In passing his thoughts turned back to Spain: the incredulous there, all the crooked smiles he remembered, and his human side came uppermost—down on deck they heard the Admiral snorting, as a horse snorts violently in his bridle—he was getting fiery up there, the Admiral and Viceroy!

But up on the forecastle walked young Pedro Gutierrez, on watch again to-night. He was silent, scanning the moon,

scanning the land. The book of fate was dark for him, dark as that night, with only a red initial letter to be seen in it, the blood-red moon. What forebodings had he? Little he knew it, but he was not of those who were to see again the brown Spanish shores. Never more would he look upon the Guadalquivir!

Sunrise on the 12th of October, the long low green island ahead in full daylight, a good league away. Sails hoisted, creaking tackles and joyful chanties from the crew, a festal sailing in!

First the *Pinta*, that dashing sailer, stiff in the breeze and cleaving the waves with a short decided nod. After her the *Niña*, graceful as ever, spreading a fringe of foam about her like the border of a gown, meeting the seas with girlish curtsies. Last of all plunged the *Santa Maria* with her rounded hull like a segment of a wheel, swinging her nose down and ploughing the seas overmuch; but she too kept up, and nothing could be done till she came.

It was a blue day, blue sea, blue sky; in front of the ships flying-fish darted up from the deep clear waves like the vanguard of the sea's wet silvery souls, and between the ships sported a friendly school of porpoises, like mermaids, in a landward gallop, they too on the top of the galloping waves, the whole making a picture, the apotheosis of Ocean and of the fortunate discoverers.

Soon they saw smoke ashore, the mark of human habitation, trees and green plains opened up as the eye slowly took bearings; it was a good, tangible island, with surf about it, veritable, excellent.

The Admiral stood high on the poop, in full dress from early morning, iron all over and a scarlet cloak besides—pretty warm, just think of it, full armour! The crew puffed

the sweat from their upper lips and thought they had too much on with a pair of linen hose and a cuirass over their bare skin. Finery was not all clover; one had to suffer for it! Besides being clad in steel, blue plates and scales, with trappings, the Admiral wore a helmet with feathers of a bird called the ostrich, doubtless some salvage from his African voyages. All this finery he had brought with him and laid by till the time arrived, so confident had he been! On his legs he wore brand-new sea-boots of tanned deerskin—imagine it, sea-boots, in his size, a unique pair of boots, each of them fit to hold a sack of flour! And people went abroad in search of curiosities, when they had such strange sights as this at home! Something different from the Admiral's old pointed shoes with the splits in them—what had happened to them, by the way? Ought they not to be preserved, even as cast-offs? they were a sort of relic. To return to the boots, wasn't it a funny thing that all through the voyage the Admiral had gone about in shoes, and now he was to go ashore he put on sea-boots? [Diego's licensed tongue.]

The Admiral heard the laughter and merriment below him on deck but was himself very serious. Was he not *too* serious for so blissful a day, when all the others were singing and the world smiled upon him in his glory?

If any one had observed the Admiral early that morning, when the sun rose and the outline of the island was disclosed beneath its rays, he would have seen as it were a shadow pass over his face; the clearer the view became the darker *he* seemed to grow. And since then he had been serious.

But now they saw him draw himself up and throw out his chest, as he called his officers aft. To them the Admiral announced that the island was to be named before they landed, after the Saviour; it was to be called *San Salvador*.

Juan de la Cosa looked up, in surprise—ought not the first land they sighted to be called after the Mother of God, in whose name the voyage had been undertaken? But the Admiral held his peace, which meant that it was to be as he had said.

High on the poop he stood against the blue sky, looking in towards land, blinking his eyes, swollen with sleeplessness; he saw the surf rising against the shore like white figures leaping up from the sea, checking themselves and sinking back again, a noiseless distant play the seaman knows, the spirits of the sea ever seeking the land; the ocean's organ was about him as it had been now for so many weeks, and for most of his life, a note that was a part of himself; the wind plucked its dull harp-chords in ropes and tackle, another part of himself; a roaring, billowing, singing within him and around him, the blue day breathed in its strength, by the bowsprit a bright-coloured soul leaped into the light and vanished again, the rainbow in the flying spray; behind him the morning sun climbed in the sky, and before him lay the day.

And as he stood there under the flying banners and pennants and the ships saluted each other over the surface of the water, fire leaping from the throats of the pieces and the sharp report deadened by sea and wind, the drifting smoke, while the seabirds wavered in their flight and rose high, scared by the shots, and the crews raised a cheer, the ships in chorus—as he stood there looking towards the new land he thrilled and saw his life before him; the life behind him was as nothing, now at last his voyage was to begin!

But it was ended. Many, many things came after—harder years than those he had left behind, petty triumphs

and an abyss of toil, the deepest-cut inscription on the tablets of history.

The shadow that had passed across his face that morning would give way to hope, and come again, until hope was driven out and there was nothing left of his face but a mask, the dumb form lent by death.

Labour, a human lot, awaited him, but his achievement as the instrument of the age was concluded. Through the power that was in his heart he had carried the age beyond itself; now it would sweep in his wake, after him and over him; the way was open.

Behind him, in the Europe he had left, it was as though men's souls were pressing each other onward to the coasts; now they would push each other out to sea and over it, the Ferryman had shown the way. The instinct in his fathers' blood had brought them as far as the South; now, he opened up the way to the other side of the world to those who followed after him.

Conquest and settlement were to be the work of others; the theme would be developed without him. For yet a little while he himself pursued the goals of mortals, but from the moment when he saw the light in the night and had thrown a bridge across the Atlantic his being passed over into Time.

V

QUETZALCOATL

THE light Columbus had seen from out at sea was a burning branch which a man carried aloft on his way from one palm-leaf hut to another on the island. When one is out so late and alone and the evening is dark, one must carry fire, not exactly to find the way, it is only a short distance through the forest and across open ground, the path is known, but who would dare to walk by himself beyond the abodes of men without fire?

The man was perfectly naked, had always been so; the air, even at night as now, lay about his limbs like a bath at blood-heat, the same heat that he felt in the waters of the lagoon when he plunged into them, the same that surrounded him in his hut and radiated from women and children, natural warmth, the only clothing he and his ancestors had ever known. But he was painted, roughly smeared with greasy ashes and charcoal all over his body in rude figures; in his nose he wore a ring of mussel-shell and an ample string of cachalot teeth about his neck. His hair reached to his shoulders, but had been chafed off between two stones over the forehead and decorated with feathers; in his free hand he carried a spear hardened at the point with fire, and in a cord round his waist was stuck a bamboo-splinter fashioned into a knife.

The fire from the burning branch he held aloft shone upon his eyes, which were black and witless, curiously skewed, like false mirrors; they seemed not so much to see

as to give expression to a wild inner imagination; and yet everything, without exception everything that took place around him was brought to his consciousness; with scared eyes he saw every leaf that moved in the forest within the circle of light he carried with him, which continually brought out the trees in front, while behind the darkness closed again upon his heels—parrots dropping noiselessly from the branch they sat on, sweeping down in a curve and up again into another tree, or sitting still and turning an eye towards the light, hopping sideways a step or two along the branch, without meaning to fly off, let's see first . . . he saw the iguana appear as the light suddenly fell upon it, with its thousand scales, its prickly spine, twisted legs, nostrils, little frightened eyes and all—but he was most apt to see what was not there, horrors and forebodings that leaped into life about him at the slightest sound of which he could not guess the cause; he showed the whites of his eyes and clutched the burning branch convulsively, raised it higher above his head and threw the light before him, towards the lofty slumbering Powers, the palms, towards the bamboo thicket, dense and grim, towards the white nocturnal mist, which filled the bushes and was a terrifying thing with a bush in its embrace, until the light made it powerless.

And when he came out of the forest into the open country he went more cautiously, he was a changed man with the different world that here met his senses; nothing but darkness in the air before him where the light ended, grass and stones entering the light as he covered the ground, a wide air here, breezy and open, with a message from afar. Now there fell upon his ears the long, rising thunder that ended in a crash, the seas running upon the reef around the island, just so long between each, he knew them, sensed

the island all the way round, caught the sea air, his big, wide-open nostrils worked, the shore was in them, the living smell of coral mud and all that moved within it, the lagoon and all its life was in his nose, his soul was as it were mapped out with all he sniffed up, one with the island, and yet filled with a fear which only the possession of fire could keep under.

A few minutes' walk brought him to a copse and in its depths a hut, like his own, the hut of a friend, a man like himself, who sat on his heels by the fire and received him with a grunt. And all he had come for was to squat on his heels likewise, in company with his friend, and converse with him in a wide-mouthed speech, docked sentences—about what? The fishing, the state of the lagoon, upon which they exchanged opinions, all-wise and marvelling; very good canoe, such and such a one; a misfortune—a man they knew had got a splinter in his foot and was dying, for such a little thing, sorcery without doubt; foreign canoes seen, news from other islands?

In the background of the hut there was a glimpse of a bunch of women and children, asleep; now and then one of them awoke and lay down again with extreme caution . . . oh, if they should happen to disturb the men! Outside the entrance to the hut, in the half-light of the fire, prowled a couple of dogs; a strange kind of dog that had no bark, wise enough about the muzzle and with a wag in the tail, talking with the ears, but with no voice; thin-coated and fat they looked, they were here domestic animals and were fattened up to the right pitch, taking the place of pigs. They showed much attention when the men inside fell to eating: roast crabs, which they opened with a stone implement, and a handful of maize, looking like so many yellow teeth; a part of the crab's fat inside was smeared

on the mouth of the god which stood under the roof of palm leaves grinning in coral-rag at the fire; manioc bread, tasting of the women's sweat, took off the edge of their appetite; of all they ate a small portion was offered to the fire and a fire prayer was mumbled between the lips; then big draughts of the calabash and the men had done, after duly belching to get rid of the spirits that might have entered with the food. Their talk naturally ran upon feasting, and their voices sank to a religious whisper: such and such an island, so many suns ago, much man food, good man, fat, big man, num, num!

And then a smoke to the night! Leaves of the good, the best plant were laid on the fire, and the men leaned over the smoke, breathed it in and drank with nose and mouth, coughed and moaned with pleasure, their eyes running and mouths watering, but happy and stifling themselves with smoke, until a god seemed to rise in it above their heads right up to the palm-leaf roof, an almighty being, the sombre narcotic spirit, friend of all poor mortals, whose name is Tobacco. Then they turned dizzy, with a glorious disquiet in their veins, a splendid headache, and they went to rest, laying themselves down where they sat, the guest as much at home here as anywhere else.

And when it was quite certain that they were asleep, shadows stole up to the fire, women and children and the dumb dogs, to share what was left. They were not sorry for it, as with hot whispering they made themselves a lovely late supper in the middle of the night, left off chewing with mouths full to listen—yes, they were asleep—and put fresh things on the fire to brown. The women whispered, loose-lipped and with little pigs' eyes, scarcely able to suppress a giggling gaiety, though most of them were still bleeding or had ugly unhealed wounds from the men's

bamboo knives. And at last they came upon a leaf or two of the good weed, flicked the hair from their faces and glanced at the sleeping men; it was as much as their lives were worth, but they laid the leaves on the fire, breathed in the poison and moaned in ecstasy. An infant began to whine and was hurriedly gagged with a breast slung over its mother's shoulder to the inmate of the bag behind. The children quarrelled over the leavings, and the little boys went for the little girls with little bamboo knives, a mimic attack all in the deepest silence, for fear of waking the divinities. Soon the whole hut was grunting in its sleep.

But when all were asleep yet another shadow crept up to the fire, an old mumbling, blind creature, the oldest in the hut, who felt about among the embers and on the floor, eating charcoal and little burnt knuckle-bones and whatever else of a greasy nature it could find, and then stayed sitting by the fire, warming itself at the glow it could not see; its hands came upon the children's bamboo splinters and it scraped its dry bird's skin with them and fell into a reptile reverie: many, many dark ages since *she* had enjoyed man's cruelty! Among the things she found were some charred scraps of tobacco—and she knew well enough which way the good thing ought to go; no smoke for her, no, into the mouth with it; greedily she thrust ashes and tobacco on to her tongue, croaked and found consolation; at last she too crawled to her rest, with the good weed in her mouth.

Smoke from the tobacco fire, that was what had reached Columbus out at sea!

The men barked in their sleep and wriggled their limbs, as though they were all joints: gruesome dreams. Little did they guess that what awaited them next day would

surpass even their most frightful and monstrous visions. What a sight they were to see!

The naked savage with a burning branch in his hand, surrounded by the horrors of night which he kept off by the fire—that was in brief the picture of his place in Nature and of his origin.

The terror of night which he felt had once been inspired in his primeval ancestors by fire; but this, the mightiest force in Nature, had been given into their hand, and with it they had subjected the beasts and the night and had even found in it a remedy for cold.

But not all of them had availed themselves of *that;* here mankind had parted, with a deep division between those who took up the battle against winter with the aid of fire, and those who gave way before it, farther and farther to the South, as conditions grew more and more severe in the North. The Ice Age set up the division. From the warm forests of the North, before that age, mankind had come, from the Lost Country; the man *Fyr* who first tamed fire and came down from the volcano with it, he carried it on a burning branch just as the savage of Guanahani went with his torch at night . . . so far then had mankind penetrated on its way to the South, in company with the warmth and the forest.

But because they had thus continually moved on in search of their own primitive surroundings, they had not changed; they were the same primitive men now as they had always been, the forest man with the few but powerful resources Fyr had once placed in his hands, the fire, the spear and the stone knife, to which the bow had been added. They still carried with them the ancient symbols, handed down from generation to generation through countless ages

but practically unchanged; for the most part symbols of fear, a general foggy tradition of the Terrible One, whether it was the power of fire, *Gunung Api,* or the *Man,* the epitome of their own cruelty in the form of some particularly bloody destroyer, who crushed many and was long remembered—in any case, Terror, and a willingness to sacrifice if the terror would let itself be appeased. That was their idea of God, which they tried to make visible to the eye in stone or wood, and more hideous images did not exist. At the base of the idea lay ancient experience, crude forces in Nature, visible or invisible; all in all a Man, *that* Man, the spirit of One who had been and still was and would always haunt them. If you felt a pain inside, it was he; if a bough fell down in the forest where you were walking, it was he, stealthy as ever; if you knocked your big toe against a stone, it was he who put it in the way, you might know that; horrible dreams, there he was again; all this in the ordinary course. If hurricanes occurred, lightning and thunder and other great calamities, then he was angry, murderous or hungry for the sight of piles of corpses; and then men felt small, with no other means of grace but the sacrifice, and not at all sure whether it would be accepted.

When he allowed them to live they lived, avenging themselves below them for what they suffered, on the animals and whatever else was in their power, biting back when the louse bit them, putting into their mouths what was fit to eat, and finding at the same time the chief of their joys, hunting. For expanding their minds they had music, blissful thumping of drums; for prayer, an ancient ingrained predilection for caves, where such were to be found, in which they could shudder and rouse the echoes, play with lights and paint the Man on the wall, and where

drums, singing and dancing had a particularly weird and supernatural effect; and as far as they dared they inspired themselves with the notion that *they* were the uncanny Powers who ruled Nature. Their greatest sin and at the same time in a mystical sense their atonement, was cannibalism.

And now for the first time the forest man was to meet his brother of half a geological period ago, the man of the Ice Age, that part of mankind which had remained in the North and had changed instead of leaving: the descendants of Carl. Would they know each other? How would the meeting go? That is just how the situation presented itself on the day Columbus landed on Guanahani.

But—it was *not* the first time. Some centuries before, there had been a man on these shores who had left deep traces in the life of the inhabitants, and had bequeathed to them an obscure but powerful memory, the legend of the *White God*. He was still worshipped by the name of *Quetzalcoatl*. Of him we shall now speak.

He came quite alone and in modest style, when he arrived rowing his single-handed craft of a hollowed tree-trunk, with no personal pomp, clad in the skins of beasts; but his appearance and nature and abilities, as they disclosed themselves, made the greatest stir and elevated him to the position he afterwards occupied in tradition as the White God.

He was fair, not like a human being according to their notion, the only one they had, since they were all dark; he was pale in the face, and all over his skin, almost terrifying to look at in the beginning, and his eyes were pale, like the air; his nose was not natural, flat and open like a human nose, but had its holes underneath and pro-

jected from the face like a beak. Strangest of all was his hair; it was light, like sunshine, and if you looked at him at a little distance it was as though he wore the sun on his shoulders. The sun! the sun! they cried when they saw him for the first time, and fell on their faces; his only difficulty in making friends with the people he met was that they dared not approach him. His beard too was light, big and long, not a couple of hairs such as ordinary men grew and pulled out, but a forest on his face and down over his chest; it was more white than yellow, he was not a young man. In the sunlight his head looked like the gold dust they found in the sands of the rivers, and gold was counted holy because it resembled his sunny head. He was tall of stature; his strength was never put to the test, nobody entertained such a thought. He himself brought them no evil, as they found out in time, and this again made him seem strange. When he stayed among them and began to show his inherent supernatural powers, not to the hurt, but, on the contrary, to the profit of all men, why, then they had him, and they showed him all the honour and solicitude that could be lavished upon a man who was the sun in person, came down to live and breathe among the children of earth.

If they asked him whence he came he pointed over the sea to east and north, the sunrise, and that was what they expected; but to one who made bold to inquire his name he replied, with a smile which might mean both that they were not to know it and that it was true, that he was a guest; later on, when he had left them again, they owned the truth of what he had said. Men who were children when he came grew old during the time he stayed, so long was it, but he himself did not seem to grow older; nor was it conceivable that he could die. They called him Quetzal-

coatl, which means bird and serpent, referring to the wind and the lightning, over which he was presumed to rule; in the arts of fire he was more versed than many people cared for, but he never misused his power. They erected a temple to him and a high seat, and adorned his head with a glory of green feathers, a whole spacious and beautiful building on his head, the greenest that had ever been seen, and a splendour reserved for the gods.

Now the man who was thus raised on high was none other than Norna Gest, who, to his other experiences, had added that of sitting on a divine throne and wearing a crown of birds' feathers on his red hair, no heavy burden and a thing which need not get about, seeing what an out-of-the-way part of the world he was in; when they prayed that he would deign to wear it he had not the heart to refuse. On the other hand he declined offerings that they wished to make to him of a bloody and fearful kind, and would only accept flowers and fruit, which occasioned the institution of a sacrifice till then unknown in the land, and drew a sharp dividing line in their religious ideas; of which more later.

First it must be briefly explained how Norna Gest had come here. A long journey, but not very remarkable in itself for a man who had time at his disposal, and no other business than sailing, like Norna Gest. It was at that period of his life when he had survived his dear ones, and sought them in vain in the most distant countries, the shores of the Dead, which he hoped to find in order if possible to meet them there. For he himself could not die, so long as the candle his mother Gro had given him was not burnt out, but the shores of the Dead he had not yet found. After searching for them in the South, as is related in his Book, he tried in the West, towards the

sunset, perhaps a hint that the realm of the Dead lay just there. He could see beforehand that there was no hope of crossing the great ocean beyond Europe in the little single-handed canoe he disposed of; but as an old and tried coaster he had experience of how far one could go if one took time and followed the outline of the land, or went up the rivers, which had taken him all round the known countries of Europe and far into the unknown before; and this form of voyaging he essayed.

First, then, he made for the North, up along the coast of Norway, paddling and fishing his way as was his wont, the life he knew of old, without hurry, staying on for a few years when a place attracted him, and covering long distances at a stretch when there was occasion for it, but keeping the far-off goal of his journey before him the whole time. From the coast of Norway on a clear day he saw islands in the ocean far to the westward, the Shetlands, and risked the passage one summer in calm weather. From there he reached the Faroes, following the flight of birds, and then Iceland; perilous voyages, and black, bitter seas in those parts, a long time to be out of sight of land, but plenty of food for a patient fisherman, broad-jawed cod in the deeps; and he was not lonely, far from it, those waters were populous with great families of whales in the current and thousands upon thousands of seabirds on the rocks ashore. Much delight had the old man in birds' eggs and a fire on a desolate ocean isle, followed by a sleep on the turf and a song to himself in the morning; he rubbed his hands with pleasure and stepped into his boat to feel the sea stirring under him, and to commit himself once more to the waves.

From Iceland he reached Greenland, more by chance than otherwise, and not without distress and loss, since a

storm drove him out into the open sea in that direction and ended by casting him on the cold shore. He lay senseless at the bottom of the boat when he reached land; fishing had failed him on the passage, and he happened to get no rain in the bottom of the canoe, his usual drink on long voyages; the seas were tremendous, and eternal night came on, icebergs towered about the hollowed chip with a man in it among the yawning waves. But he rode out the gale in a swoon, and came to himself on Greenland's coast, turned walrus-hunter and clothed himself in the skin of the polar bear, lost himself in endless fjords and wastes, stayed here for ages and worked his way farther and farther north, hibernated in the snow, short of fuel for his solitary fire, nothing but driftwood; but what he got he examined and inferred that there was land to the westward from which it came; and over he went, to the northernmost cold islands on the other side.

So he was across, and then went south along the coast, in and out of fjords, for many ages, on many shores, till he reached milder climes again; still farther down, till he was in the warmth, and then the old man shook his shoulders and let the days go by, living on fish and solitude, among lovely islands; tasted the flying-fish, which came on board of itself, and found it good; and here at last he met with men without avoiding their company.

This was on the mainland, inside the great gulf with all the islands lying beyond it in the ocean; from the coast he came up to the high country where a great nation lived, gathered about the foot of the fiery mountain Popocatepetl, at once the symbol of their origin, their fire-giver and their greatest foe. To them he attached himself; if he had not found the shores of the Dead he had yet found mortals, whose lot in their blindness moved him to stay, if thereby

he could alleviate their destinies. And here it fell out that, through no particular merit of his own, he was included among their gods and protected the people, so long as he had their support, against those of their deities who were at any rate worse than himself.

The first thing he did for them was to free them from their dependence on the fiery mountain. For they were still no further advanced than the primitive folk they were descended from, who had dwelt around Gunung Api, in the Lost Country; they knew the use of fire but could not themselves produce it, and had to get it from the mountain, the lightning or the forest fire, if their fire went out. Norna Gest taught them the holy need-fire, produced by drilling, the Ice Folk's greatest acquisition and possession; nothing of an art when you knew it, but to the poor primitive people of an importance scarcely to be measured.

With the difference in intelligence that separated them it was no wonder they connected the stranger with the sky and thought he was son of the Sun, perhaps the Sun himself, the first time they saw him conjure up fire between his hands from two pieces of wood.

It weakened the high, cruel Powers of Fire in whose proximity they dwelt and from whose terrors they had derived the conceptions of their gods—the lightning-god Tezcatlipoca, the bloody war-god Huitzilopochtli, to whom they offered human hearts. Quetzalcoatl showed displeasure when they were named, and utterly refused to accept sacrifices of the kinds that were offered to them. In this way a sort of conflict of gods arose, to which the people were witness, greatly desiring that Quetzalcoatl might have the victory; but as it fell out, the decision was postponed to the future, after the departure of Quetzalcoatl.

Besides the art of fire Norna Gest taught them agriculture. Maize, a very good cereal, grew in these countries, but the natives as yet knew nothing of cultivating it; they only gathered what grew wild, ranging all day for a few handfuls of grain. Norna Gest taught them to plant it, made a hole like a mouth in the ground and put a grain in it, feeding the earth and bidding them see what it would do in return. To be sure, they had a long time to wait, most of them forgot all about it; but when the plant came up, and Norna Gest had made the experiment often enough, the connection actually became clear to some of them; little maize gardens outside the villages came to gladden the eyes of Norna Gest and convince him that now they knew the art of giving in order to get back, before he left them. A proof that the hearts of the poor savages were good at bottom was that they repaid this simple service with boundless gratitude and devotion, and raised his chair on an additional foundation that he might sit more loftily.

By degrees he was raised quite on high, with many steps up. In the working of flint he also taught them things of importance and received their excessive thanks. They had positively superstitious ideas of him as a carpenter. The rudiments of the use of metals too he conveyed to them. On the other hand the country possessed no animals that could be tamed. But he taught them to keep birds for the delight they gave. Nay, so unbounded was the skill they attributed to Quetzalcoatl that many things they themselves produced or developed later were credited to him: architecture, social order, the calendar, the construction of canals, acquirements which came much later, after Quetzalcoatl had departed; all blessings were referred to the White God. Even the children's best games were said to have been learnt from him. Not only the people here but

other peoples inland and far down the coast had the same tradition of this teacher and benefactor who had first shown them the way to a better mode of existence and had then gone back to his home in the sun or the morning star. From such a depth did they look up to an ordinary human being.

They did everything for Quetzalcoatl while he was with them, offered him flowers and fruit continually, wove him marvels of robes of humming-bird feathers, made him suns of raw gold in the semblance of his face to adorn his temple, showed him every mark of honour, except blood-offerings, which were distasteful to him. As yet, though, these could not altogether be abolished. Huitzilopochtli demanded his food and got it, but for their wars and human slaughterings Quetzalcoatl showed no sympathy; on the contrary, he turned away or stopped his ears when such things were talked of in his presence.

But in order that no living sacrifice might be left untried, they brought him women, bands of the country's choicest maidens, who would otherwise have been slaughtered and whose hearts would have been given to the god, hot, freshly torn out and still beating, while Huitzilopochtli's priests would have eaten the rest, the young, childishly sweet limbs.

Quetzalcoatl let them come to him, kept them and had them maintained as his property. They should surely not die; oh no, quite the reverse, they should taste of life. He let his eye rest upon them and found them fine and beautiful brown buds, with eyes like the tropical night with a firefly in them, limbs like honey, some of them; they were not to be disdained, a wrong that no woman deserves. But there was something not quite right about their joy at being allowed to live and being given to this sun; they could not

be brought to raise their eyes to Grandfather, it was as though they froze in their nakedness amid the warmth of his beams.

So, when he considered them ripe, he gave them to young men of their own year, ho, ho, ho, and it was strange to see how they could shine, now it was they whose faces almost looked like little suns!

And afterwards the young people sent kisses up into the air to Quetzalcoatl, as before they had been wont to send kisses up to the sun; and when he was no longer among them they and their descendants scattered kisses to the winds that they might reach him.

For his part the old man had memories which kept him alone for ever.

The longer he lived among these people, who had so much worship in them, the more layers of their sense of distance did they put under him, more and more steps up to him; soon he was sitting high up in the air at the top of a pyramid, and at last he began to feel rather lonely up there.

The time came when Norna Gest longed for home. Those he bore in his heart and carried with him about the world wherever he went, they were dead, and it would be a long time ere he found the land where they had gone; but at home in northern dales dwelt a people of peasants whose ancestor he was; he wanted to walk beneath rowan trees again and meet blunt young swains upon the roads who would greet an old stranger courteously and in whose features he might see that they had blood in them of her who once, many generations ago, had been so dear to him.

Great was the dismay in Tenochtitlan when Quetzalcoatl announced that he would have to depart, and deep the sorrow of those who accompanied him down to the coast.

Yet they understood that he wished to return to his bright abodes in the East beyond the ocean. And he had promised them to come again!

Yes, Quetzalcoatl bade them remember that if he did not come, others of his kind would come; they were not to doubt that, even if, perchance, it might be long.

Thereupon Quetzalcoatl stepped into his old tried canoe, poor enough for a god, but so much the more marvellous since he traversed the seas in it, said farewell to his priesthood and dipped his oar; they saw his back as he paddled out, with long considerate strokes. Ah, kindly even to the waves, thought those who stood ashore with tear-dimmed eyes .and were never to see Quetzalcoatl again.

And Norna Gest rowed back the immensely long way in the opposite direction.

But the priesthood of Tenochtitlan raised images to him in stone, wherein he could be seen with his curved nose and his beard, with feathers on his head and surrounded by his symbols as the bringer of Light.

Ages passed, and he became a myth. The worship of Huitzilopochtli overshadowed him again, with all its horror, but stronger and stronger lived the tradition that the White God would come again.

VI

THE WHITE GOD'S RETURN

AND thus things stood when Columbus opened up the way from Europe to the new countries in the West, which he believed to be India, but which, without *his* ever finding it out, proved to be an entirely new continent, with yet another ocean beyond separating it from India.

It took a century to make out merely the outline of the immense continent, which was given the name of America, centuries more to penetrate the interior of these countries, which extend for the whole length of the earth, through all the zones from one Pole down towards the other. The islands Columbus found came to be called the West Indies, the natives Indians, to the ineradicable memory of the error which formed the basis of his discovery. In the track of Columbus followed a string of other discoverers, whose luck it was to have the way made easier for them; on their heels came adventurers and conquerors, the Conquistadores; Europe had sprung a leak, its expansion was rapid, by leaps and bounds. But to the natives the whole of this invasion from the East seemed at the outset a movement which could be summed up in one and the same strongly agitated point of view: the return of the White God.

What a difference between the time when Quetzalcoatl left them and when he came again! It was the measure of

the change wrought by the intervening centuries in him and his race, the variable ones.

The primitive people themselves were not the same, in many respects they had advanced, and in a very different degree in different parts; but in the main they were still living at the beginning of life, with the same primeval power above them, in the terrible likeness of Popocatepetl, fire and judgment. We are acquainted with their existence down to its details through the accounts preserved by history of their encounters with the Whites, for the most part seen from *their* side and furnishing at the same time the history of the destruction of these American nations as nations; it is best to prepare the meeting of these two widely severed cultures, whose roots were nevertheless in contact, by placing ourselves at the natives' point of view before the meeting took place.

The heart of the native American culture, which the Conquistadores thrust at and pierced wherever they came, lay in Mexico, the ancient empire of the Aztecs, in the interior and towards the centre of the two vast half-continents. The world Columbus found lay outside, a rampart of islands in the ocean fencing the great gulf that leads to Mexico, so far away that the report of Columbus was long in reaching Tenochtitlan, the Aztecs' capital. The tradition of Quetzalcoatl, on the other hand, had penetrated from there to the uttermost islands, so that Columbus was received as the White God as soon as he landed on Guanahani; the great tidings only reached Tenochtitlan in a tangible form with the first reports of the approaching Cortes. The description of the two meetings, different as the two men were, is merged in the same bird's-eye view.

Popocatepetl was in eruption during the years when the Europeans arrived in the new world, like Tenerife in the old world they had left; they seemed to be years of terror on both sides, foreboding great events.

In Tenochtitlan there was great alarm, the Lofty One yawned and sent forth fire, nights of horror with a sooty glow high up among the stars in the region of the mountain-top and a flickering gleam which came and went upon the mud walls of the pueblo. What had come over Popocatepetl, the Reeky, who in the memory of priests and other thinkers had continued peacefully smoking into the sky, from which he had his name? Now he gave off pulsing volumes of smoke by day, flashed lightnings and shrouded himself in fetid airs, and at night he smouldered with bursting bubbles of flame, so that even those down below, huddling in the houses of Tenochtitlan, saw a ghost-like gleam in the holes of the roof and could not sleep. A strange sport was witnessed; the mountain puffed out immense smoke-rings, shaped by his mouth, which rolled up slowly towards the summit of heaven, shining at night, and it looked as though Popocatepetl crowned himself with one halo of fire after another, hovering above his head, and a world of lightnings about his brow; was he angry with the stars? Were fearful fiery visions maturing in his mind? The more simple-minded ventured to suppose that the mountain had fallen out with Iztaccihuatl, Popocatepetl's wife with the white head of snow, the other great volcano of the plateau; that must have been the reason why he girt himself about with storms, thundered continually, rocked in his foundations and gave birth to all kinds of tempests; but the vulgar are ever apt to seek an explanation in their own narrow circle of experience. If they cast their eyes upon the priests they could not help noticing that *they* looked pale

and shaken, and the turn given to public worship soon taught them that things were greatly amiss.

At the beginning the priests diligently practised their old and tried art of exorcism and conciliation: they smoked the pipe of peace with the mountain. A simple, an inevitable consistency formed the basis of this holy act, which was almost a legal form; you smoked together, and so long as you smoked quietly and moderately down on earth it was expected that the Great Spirit would smoke quietly and moderately up in Heaven, it was as good as an agreement, a covenant, and in fact the mountain had kept to it hitherto. They went up on high, to the top of the temples, so that he might see it, many men together to remind him of the covenant, the whole priesthood with the high priest at their head; they blew smoke up towards him, held up their stone pipes that he might see them: gentle smoking here, *here* they carried out their obligations! In vain. When the pipe of peace failed they saw that the treaty had been denounced. And then there was nothing for it but great blood-offerings. Popocatepetl blazed and was red, his many hundred altars in Tenochtitlan also blazed and were red.

The temples of the Aztecs were their country and their gods over again, in their very forms they were symbols of the worship; from the holy image the child of nature derives all his conceptions, as does the child. The Mexican dwelt on the roof of an immense temple Nature herself had erected, a plateau raised to the height of a mountain above the surrounding country, a land above the land, with its foot in the tropics and the ladder of the zones with its stages of vegetation climbing its sides; and up on the tableland in the rarefied air, the air of the condor, the home of the cactus and the aloe, mighty volcanoes towered

yet higher, mountain crowning mountain, gods set on high, as the simple, wise child of nature thinks, and as he is one with almighty Nature and bows down to her, images leap from his soul and take shape in worship; in this way the Aztec temple had come about.

It was formed as a mound, with no interior, encased in masonry, with many terraces and platforms and steps the whole way up; the way the whole people had once ascended was now followed by the priests as a holy symbol. Above, the pyramid ended in a platform, upon which two towers were raised; within them stood the images of the gods. In front of the towers were two altars with fires that never went out, the eternal fire; more than six hundred of them could be seen burning night and day above the mud roofs of the pueblo of Tenochtitlan, and between them stood the stone of sacrifice. The whole arrangement of the temple an image of the mountain, and worship under the open sky, before the eyes of all, as though it was a worship of the mountain himself, Popocatepetl, the Great One, in an image adapted to human wit, but powerful, as is every likeness.

And now that Popocatepetl was disturbed, the disturbance grew more violent here. Evil portents had occurred before the unearthly terrors of the mountain began; some years previously the great lake in which Tenochtitlan was built had overflowed its banks, without any explicable cause, either tempest or earthquake, and had licked off a large piece of the pueblo; comets had been seen; one of the towers of the biggest temple took fire of itself, the finger of God; and finally, just lately, a heavenly portent had been seen, in the East, as it were a fiery pyramid bedecked with stars; not a doubt but great things were approaching from that quarter, or else the end of the world was at hand.

So it was high time to appease the Powers and to sway their minds if possible with appropriate gifts.

No less than seventy thousand victims, prisoners of war and whatever else could be used to stock the pens, where they were kept and fattened up; processions two miles long, advancing slowly, step by step, up towards the temples as the head of the column was eaten off, so many at a time, apart from the daily scores and yearly thousands—such was the human contribution given to the gods. The obsidian knife, of volcanic glass taken from Popocatepetl's flanks and endowed with his nerve, was never at rest, and the priests, clad in red tunics, or with the flayed skin of a newly slaughtered victim drawn over them, grew weary, and so heavy with clotted gore from top to toe that they could scarcely keep going; still a god seemed to hold up their arms for yet another day, fresh strength was ever granted them for the few motions they had to perform; when others had stretched the victim on his back over the convex stone of sacrifice, tight across the stomach, they had only to plunge the flint knife in and tear out the throbbing heart with its roots, show it to the god and fling it into his sacrificial bucket. Then down the steps with the rest to those below, who did the quartering and roasting down in the smoking forecourts, where justice was done to the god's appetite, the holy mimicry—a sacrament, but interpreted so literally by many that they went about in a frenzy of slaughter, with eructations so violent that they nearly threw them down, eruptions which on a small scale were again a mimicry of the mountain. Children were sacrificed . . .

Ugh, no, enough! Things yet more repulsive were done, accounts are not lacking; but it almost seems that the abominations become worse in print, which is of a later

day, and belongs to another order of imagination. Those who did the deeds were believers, naïve, when all is said and done there was a certain beauty in their thus devoting themselves to their Powers with blood and death; Nature was so immense, and they were innocent souls. Beautiful was primitive man in his submission to the mountain and the sun, the great marvels at which the enlightened stares in spiritual poverty; Nature was still within his heart, not outside it. Naturally the brute in him also asserted itself—has it even now died out altogether in the enlightened?

Meanwhile, for all their sacrifices and ceremonies, the evil omens did not show any signs of being warded off; and in fact they proved true enough, truer even than had been suspected. And in the presence of so much that presaged ill in Nature, and so much tension among the Aztecs themselves, they tried more and more to fortify themselves in the hope of Quetzalcoatl's return.

Besides the ancient sacred traditions which were kept alive by Quetzalcoatl's priests and by his images and temples—a great but distant tradition—new ones were gradually coming in, without any one knowing exactly where they came from, rumours in the air, such as occur among primitive people who breathe an image from one to another over great distances, short memories, but the rumour lives: Quetzalcoatl *had* been seen!

He was said to be already on the coast, out among the farthest islands, and it was only a question of time when they might expect him on the mainland. Well, well, let him come! Ah yes, all for the best, Huitzilopochtli was hard; even the most zealous in sacrificing to him, Montezuma himself, the high priest and war lord, could but sigh for his own part and feel loathing; he was eating everything up—would that a milder god might come!

It took a score of years before the report of the white man's coming reached the Tenochtitlan, just as the light reaches us from a star which no longer exists. Columbus was dead; and when at last Quetzalcoatl followed his rumour from the islands to the mainland it was not in the person of Columbus but of Cortes that he was received by the Aztecs.

The excitement occasioned by Columbus soon died away, like rings in the water when a stone has been thrown into it; he did not distinguish himself as some of his successors, nor were they the right people he had come in contact with. The first of all, as we have seen, out on the extreme coral islands and skerries facing the ocean, were nothing but poor crab-eaters, without power or possessions, scarcely even capable of great sensations; and yet the meeting was an overwhelming one, so much had they of a culture which was otherwise distant and had its centres on the mainland, that they knew it for the coming of Quetzalcoatl, that day when the strange many-voiced thunder was heard from the sea, lightnings in broad daylight, and the three winged wonders swept in round the north of the island and lay to under the lee of its western shore.

Emotional images, vast and vague, like dazzling mirrors in the soul, arose at once in those who saw anything at all; the majority turned their blind end and dashed headlong into the bush. The women's part was a distant flicker, like everything that happened in the world of men; some disaster, no doubt, this time, perhaps the sea had gone to pieces; what a frightful thing!

But there are those to whom curiosity is the most ungovernable of all forces, it would draw them into the very jaws of death, simply to look down his throat; this sort stayed upon the beach; nay, they even went to meet the god

and his attendants when they came ashore. Gradually, as their heads cooled, they began to see properly and experienced the greatest expansion of the soul, as when one infers the unknown from the known and it tallies: why, they were *big canoes* these marvels, mighty huge canoes, too big to be true, but canoes all the same, not to be mistaken! There were trees growing out of them, and they had wings, which they were now folding; they were higher than a man could shoot with a bow, and all at once they had young, a baby marvel that pushed off from the mother and came paddling in to land. Of course, gods who came from the Ocean must live in big canoes, and naturally they carried thunder and lightning with them, for the god in heaven is known by these signs. And now they were to see him!

He seemed to have wings as he stepped ashore, great gloriously coloured things fluttering from his shoulders, and his face was that of Quetzalcoatl, as even the most foolish person could tell, big and fair, with a thick golden beard, not a doubt but it was he! His eyes were like the sky, but he was clothed like the sea, in a shining blue sheath, like a big beetle—God guard our tongues!—but is not the beetle a god too? In his hand he carried a long, long knife, nothing like bamboo, but what was it made of? A flame, a thing of air? The foremost and boldest of the natives was to find out how it felt, for when God held it out to him in greeting he grasped it and cut his fingers.

The great white strangers performed a curious dance; they knelt on the sand and seemed to address themselves to the heaven they had just come from, lifting up their voices in chorus, slow and powerful notes; and the tallest and whitest among them planted his wings in the sand, delivered a message and caused it to be traced on white tablets, a ceremony of which the savages understood nothing at all—

least of all that it meant their own island did not belong to them any more.

Besides the wings, or whatever they were, they raised a tree on the beach, with a man on it hung up to die, only an image but very lifelike; and in the hands of the strangers the savages noticed smaller copies of the same stake bearing a tortured corpse.

?? Shaking of heads . . .

And he who shook his head wore a yellow ring in his nose; that did not escape the attention of the strangers . . .

Thus did they meet, these two whom the ages had parted; the one naked as he was born, still reposing with his child's soul in Nature's bed-chamber, the other clad in iron and bearing about him many deposits which *his* existence had taught him. One side saw in the other the messengers of Heaven and were to have their vision corrected before very long; the other side came with an equipment of factitious dreams which they were to exchange for a reality they did not care for. Such was the traffic that would take place between them, with many, many other consequences.

In all the islands at which Columbus afterwards touched he was taken for the White God, until he, and more particularly his men, took pains to make the natives better informed. Columbus did not treat them harshly, even when as Viceroy and Governor he had to keep order in the colonies he founded, no more than the rights of war according to the ideas of the time; but he had not much luck either. He sold the natives into slavery a little—the morality of the age; and that was not the worst thing, even as certain women prefer rape to missing their destiny—wherever he went he scraped the place clean for gold and reversed the natives' ideas of the yellow metal; it had been prized for its colour, because it reminded them

of Quetzalcoatl; now they had a better understanding of its value, since the white men flew at each other's throats to get at it first; one might rather ask how much a red beard was worth in terms of the heavy yellow dust.

Reverence for the messengers of Heaven received a blow, and all the archangels Columbus left behind in a stockaded camp in Haiti, before returning home from his first voyage, were simply killed off—a lot of galley-slaves and swashbucklers, expert in tearing gold rings out of native ears and capable of surmounting the barrier of dirt, grease and stench which separated them from the natives' women—among them poor young Pedro Gutierrez, who had been put in command. Oh, they were very mortal, the white gods, and reeled just like other men, whether they got it with the bamboo knife, arrows from an ambush, or clubs on the head, twenty natives against one.

When Columbus returned he found them buried here and there, some of them, a nest of carrion full of ants; one of their heads he found in a basket in a native hut. Business was opened.

A trifling incident has been preserved about one of the savages from Guanahani whom Columbus met again later as he was sailing on among the islands and hauled up, for political reasons, in order to cover him with gifts and let him paddle on and make a good impression wherever he landed. He had in his canoe—the inventory is from Columbus's own papers—a piece of native bread as big as a fist, a calabash of water, a piece of red earth powdered and then kneaded into a dough, and some dried leaves, "which must be a thing they set great store by, since they have already brought me some of them as gifts in San Salvador" (tobacco); "and he carried with him a

little basket of the native kind, in which he had a chain of small glass beads and two stivers" . . . which showed Columbus that the man came from San Salvador, where he had received these gifts from himself, in exchange for cotton, parrots and spears, which the natives brought of their own accord as offerings to the gods. We can imagine the naked savage in his canoe, far out at sea, paddling for dear life, hastening towards a distant island, where perhaps he has friends to whom before too many suns have set he *must* show his prodigious treasures and tell of the rich god from whose own hand he has received them!

For the untried savages were at first quite staggered with joy at all the wonders that came to them over the sea and of which they had a share. Even now, four hundred years after, our ears may be haunted by a faint tinkle of all the little bells with which Columbus and all the other discoverers after him enticed the natives; the old papers that tell the story of the discoveries simply ring with bells, a huge decoy performance, part of the same trick as the glass beads, red rags and the little mirrors, the backs of which the savages couldn't help clutching the first time they had them in their hands, to get hold of the mystical brother behind.

The little bells which had such a success are always referred to as hawk's bells; they were the kind hunting hawks had on their claws to ring in their flight when they swooped from the sky upon the heron, the primitive joy of the hunter; a bell of this kind is to be seen in Holbein's portrait of a nobleman with a hawk; sleigh-bells are descended from them, and little bells on the reins with which we played at horses as children are the last survivors of them. The medieval predilection for the sound of bells—people once wore them on their clothes—was now

discarded to the savages and found a market among them; ah yes, the cannibal, already tricked out to advantage with a bone in his nose and pegs in his ears and nothing else, swaggered about happily with a bell tied in the towzle of his hair. You could lure them to you from a distance with the seductive music, they stood as though rooted to the ground and turned their ear: a little god, a bright thing with a mouth that sang in sweet tones—a smile spread on the face of the cannibal, so that you saw a head full of big, white, greedy teeth; but a hair was enough to bind him when he was moved, his hand came out: if he might but have it, if the little god might be his!

Then they put him to scraping gold dust out of the river sand for fourteen racking days, and he came with his bag, all bent and weighed down on one side from the load, heavy enough to bring a man to his knees, and got his bell, turned his back, went, and his shoulders showed how happy he was. Old hardened caciques with white hair on their legs hobbled long distances to listen to the speech of the bell, it was yet vouchsafed them in the evening of their life to catch a sound so lovely. Youth will always run after a new thing, but here old experience had to admit that it was no delusion, but a real, tangible, divine marvel!

This was the little tinkler; later came the big bell. The time was not far off when from the solid walls of churches it would peal out over coral beach and mangrove, startling birds and filling the sunrise and sunset, as in the old countries.

Ay . . . just as a few centuries before, when the first brave missionaries pressed into the dense forests of Northern Europe and tempted the rude natives in their cowhides with the prayer-bell. There too it had begun with a little

bell and ended with the great doomsday peals of the cathedrals.

Was it then a discarded thing which had now grown too old for Europe and might suitably and with advantage be imposed upon the savages overseas?

In any case the bell which thus ingratiated itself with its lively note meant no harm; it was never the intention of a man like Columbus that the poor creatures who sat in darkness should be won to grace by other than gentle means.

The Conquistadores had other ideas. What did they have cannons for? The souls of the heathen . . . put them in harness first and then the sacrament! Nor were the natives of the mainland so harmless as the happy islanders out in the ocean; the first Whites who had anything to do with them got a taste of their *macquauitl*, a wooden sword with obsidian flakes fixed in both edges, a horrible weapon; the Mexicans were still living in the Stone Age but had not much to learn in the art of making holes in human skin, and they were a numerous, respectable enemy; no cosseting was wasted on them in the course of their conversion to Christianity.

The first news the Mexicans had of the great strangers was when Grijalva appeared off the coast with his ships. The conquest was undertaken from Cuba, where Diego Velasquez was Governor, one of the great family of the Diegos, who now began to get their foot in and spread themselves in the new world. Grijalva had been preceded by another hidalgo, Cordova, who had been in these parts rummaging for slaves, and had put in at Yucatan—which means, "What do you say?" a corruption of the natives' question, *tectetan*, when they did not understand the white men's language, and the country is called so to this

day. He saw great permanent buildings there, not palm-leaf huts that would burn in a moment like those in the islands, and the natives were rude, indelicate, able-bodied men, and short of temper. Grijalva's experiences on the coast beyond the gulf came near to martyrdom, he got a dusting, and was chased out to sea again with the remnant of his men.

Among them was Bernal Diaz, who afterwards, when an old man in Guatemala, wrote his reminiscences, an incomparable work, and an incomparable man, eye-witness and participator in the whole conquest of Mexico, brave, simple, without guile, a true, noble Spaniard, and an honourable pen to boot; he it was who even in peace time could not sleep except in armour and on the floor; when he was out of the game a mighty clockwork in him, running down, caused him to write a book bulky as Homer, and as weighty in its contents.

Only the *Iliad* can be compared with the story of the conquest of Mexico, but we are so much nearer to it in time; the action is equally heroic, but the actors are men we almost know. Is that age so far from us? Only thirteen or fourteen generations separate us from it, a living tradition from grandfather to grandson would not have been repeated so very many times, and might have reached us orally, if written authorities had not rendered it superfluous. Here then is the voice of Bernal Diaz across the ages; it is meet to make obeisance to his book, and to refer those to it who would be witnesses of the conquest of Tenochtitlan. Here but a brief attempt will be made to bring out those features which throw light on the meeting between the child of nature and the white man.

The name of the Indian who saw Grijalva's ships and brought the news to Tenochtitlan has come down to us;

he was called Pinotl, and was one of Montezuma's tax-gatherers down on the coast. To him came another Indian telling him that he had seen winged towers which moved hither and thither out at sea. Others who were sent as scouts reported that they had seen two such towers at sea, and from one of them a canoe had been put into the water with a kind of men in it; they were white in the face, and had big beards, and were cased in strange bright and shining sheaths. Then Pinotl himself hurried to the coast, and was lucky enough to meet the strangers, even went on board one of the towers, and had a conversation with them; much play of features, we may presume, and an abundance of finger language on the part of the strangers, from which it appeared that the business of the shining beings was to come and visit the great lord in the great city up beyond the mountains of which they had heard . . . he was very rich, wasn't he? how much gold? Arms spread out, and mimic invitations to Pinotl to spread out his arms and show how much gold his master had.

As soon as the towers had flown away to another part of the coast, where, as we have seen, Grijalva was half cut to pieces by the natives' flint swords and afterwards avoided the shore, Pinotl travelled night and day till he reached Tenochtitlan, where he presented himself to Montezuma and the whole Council, and declared that he had seen and talked with gods. Pinotl had caused descriptions of the gods and their sea-palaces to be drawn up on aloe-paper in picture-writing and Mexican hieroglyphics, and these were laid before the Council.

If we had them now! If only they existed as a marginal note to the sanguinary and moving tragedy which was soon to be enacted! They would have been evidence of how the Aztecs conceived and pictured the Spanish knights

whom they took for gods; the scale was added by themselves. But no doubt they served with other combustibles to heat the pot in which some Spanish soldier cooked his supper, according to the habit of these descendants of the Vandals. They shared the fate of all the priceless golden works of art from Mexico which went into the melting-pot; the treasures of Peru, which Pizarro laid hands on, vases and wheels of gold, so many that they filled a room twenty-two feet long, and sixteen feet wide, to a height of nine feet from the floor, the ransom of Atahuallpa—which did not save his life—treasures whose value as works of art no European was ever to guess, and which Pizarro ran his bloated swashbuckler's eye over before having them beaten flat, so as not to take up too much room in the heap, and then melted down. The butcher did not know that their value as antiquities was more than their weight in gold, and they rose again in the form of the many four-fold inch-thick gold chains which grace the bull-necks in the portraits of all the sixteenth-century princes and grandees, the *Family*, the end of all estates and all gold: a superfluity of it in Europe and all the corpses, the overthrow of nations in mythical America! But that is the story of Pizarro, the exterminator of the Incas, a chapter by itself and a later one in the red book of the Conquistadores.

Courage is required to pronounce judgment on these terrible men, in whose hands more destiny was laid than Nature had designed captains of condottieri to deal with; for *they* were courageous, perfectly mad fellows as regards life and limb, and one would have to feel equal to a duel with them, even in retrospect, before putting them in their place. They placed themselves where they now stand, men of iron before the eyes of all; we must be content to regard

them and leave judgment to self-destructive Nature, which produced them to the doom of many and to the assurance, in any case, of their own memory. Even bad men they can scarcely be called; when Pizarro as an old man died a violent death, stabbed by Almagro's gang who betrayed him on his own threshold, after fencing like an angel and reviling them entrancingly, he drew a cross of his own blood on the floor with his finger and kissed it before he breathed his last; that man was not solid all through, he had a little space inside in which he kept the image of his God. And with all he brought about Cortes captivates us by a certain extraordinary gaiety, the warrior's and sportsman's superfluous vitality, the propensity to outbursts of joviality among friends, for they were all young, a band of high-spirited boys let loose in a new world; in the face of a cruel death for themselves or for the overwhelming masses of their enemies they could not leave a trooper's jest unspoken or forbear to taste the fruits the country offered. Both Cortes and Pizarro were *Estremeños*, natives of Estremadura, where from of old the population had been a cross between Goths and Moors, without a doubt a very powerful mixture and a clue to the understanding of a character in which chivalry and contempt for human life, pomp and cruelty, imagination and absence of nerves, fortitude, faithlessness, pretty nearly all qualities except weakness, formed a whole of such vitality and frightfulness.

To give Cortes fair play we must in the first place not forget that with an army of six hundred and ten men he entered a country, by nature a fortress, with a population of millions, armies of hundreds of thousands of devils, after having burnt his ships, to conquer it or die. But he had ten cannons and sixteen horses! At his back his own people lay in wait, the Governor of Cuba, with the authority

of the Spanish State, who was jealous of his enterprise; at a decisive moment he had to turn against a hostile Spanish army, the Narvaez episode, with all Mexico about his ears; but he beat him and diluted his own band with his men, forcing disasters to his own advantage, and ploughed his bloody way on, in the track of the guns, towards the fable city of Tenochtitlan.

Pinotl's report convinced Montezuma and all other initiates that Quetzalcoatl was in the country. And when in the following year Cortes arrived, he met with the reception due to the White God, though not entirely without reservation; there was a certain hesitation about it, for the interval had already added features to the traditional idea of the god of goodness which were somewhat at variance therewith: first Cortes' relentless war against the Tlascalans, the enemies of the Aztecs, and then his alliance with them, a step unlike Quetzalcoatl and one very dangerous to Tenochtitlan.

But otherwise there could be but little doubt that they were, if not Quetzalcoatl himself, his descendants, in any case *Teules*, supernatural beings. They were associated with fire and thunder, or were themselves thunder gods, that was granted, not rumour and vague talk but actual fact; a sufficient number of people had seen and heard the thunder-engine in their hands and seen the results; the frightful pipe from which fire and smoke leaped, just as from the mouth of Popocatepetl, and with the same deadly effect at a distance as the lightning: trees sent flying in splinters a long, long way from where the thunder was heard, and bloody lanes opened in the native army long before they came near to the ranks of the Teules, men torn to pieces wholesale; Popocatepetl could not have raged

more furiously with his showers of stones and lightnings. Occasionally they had even found the thunderbolt lying cold on the ground, but a portent even when dead, heavy, round, of an unknown hardness and with a cold, blue lustre underneath its crust; evidently the same stuff as their thin swords, blue as the air, which gave off lightning while still far away and which they whirled so pitilessly in hand-to-hand fighting; the same stuff as the sheaths were made of which covered them from top to toe, with only little slits for the eyes to look out of, impenetrable to any weapon.

Ah, how poor were the Mexicans' little smoke tricks compared with the Teules'; at the beginning they advanced towards them with their incense-ladles full of smouldering copal, and smoked at them, an idea borrowed from the mountain and of presumed mystical effect, since he whom they smoked was thought, by virtue of similarity and in connection with perfume, to be brought under the influence of their gods. Alas, they needed a favourable wind if the smoke was to reach any one; and there was no heavy, round, murderous body with it to emphasize the enchantment and tear holes in the order of battle. No, they were only human, and the strangers were children of the Sun.

Xicotencatl, the leader of the Tlascalans, finally put the matter to the proof, while his people were still opposed to the Teules; if they were children of the Sun it was to be assumed that they only enjoyed their strength in the daytime when the sun was out; he was therefore advised to attack them at night—but what happened? He found them wide awake and fully aware of the secret plan before the attack took place; they knew everything, useless to strive any more with gods! The authors of the plan had their entrails taken out and pepper put in their place, by way of letting them feel remorse, and Xicotencatl then entered

into an alliance with the sons of the Sun as the most sensible alternative, since he had to make a choice.

It was this Xicotencatl's aged blind father, a man of great influence in the country, who begged permission to feel Cortes' countenance, as he could not see him, after peace had been established; and what he felt was perhaps the best characterization of Cortes, if it could have been translated into language; but the old blind Indian took it into the grave with his finger-tips.

Other proofs presented themselves, both to the Tlascalans and to the Aztecs: Cortes sent men up Popocatepetl, and that while it was in full eruption, under the leadership of a certain Ordaz, not without the Christian name of Diego; a demented band who tramped up over Popocatepetl's brow, to the horror and profound distaste of everybody in Mexico, for if they were without fear they ought at least to have had modesty! But it was done, and the mountain allowed it, a fresh proof that they were gods, unpleasant ones, but gods. Cortes was even cool enough to have sulphur brought from Popocatepetl's crater for the production of powder: the identity was obvious, destroyers both!

Not only did they command thunder and lightning but bows with arrows like those of men, cross-bows—the wrath of God in their hands; they had a loud and evil clang, like a hurtling in the air; too late then to jump aside, the bolt was in you, and you had to put your hand behind you to feel it before you fell, it went right through. And these deadly things were tipped with the blue sky-metal, the same kind as the heavy round thunderbolts. Fire would not bite on it; on the contrary it did it good, a ball like this grew bright in the fire, dazzling at last like the very sun, of which of course it was a part; so there again they were face to face with the marvel.

But then the horses! Those who saw a horseman for the first time and naturally thought it was *one* creature, the heavy Spanish tilting chargers, in iron and trappings like their riders, and the trussed and clanking man on top, a single six-limbed, snorting creature charging along—oh, they raised a howl, fell down, crept on all fours to get away, hopelessly, but they couldn't move; they had been struck with a palsy, were like toads inside and out, sick axolotls out of their element; they lightened themselves in their fright, like certain birds when they take wing; the day they saw a horseman for the first time taught them panic. But what when the creature broke in two! For sometimes the man dismounted, and made two terrors out of one! If they had really been reptiles, the luckless ones who saw it, they would certainly have lost their tails; they would have been driven to the extremity of letting their tails go; but they were men and could only shudder until they collapsed, and there they lay.

Cortes took advantage of this, as Bernal Diaz tells us, the terror inspired by the horses at first, to make an impression on an embassy the natives sent to his camp. He had a mare concealed behind the place to which the ambassadors were shown, taking care that it was to windward, and at the right moment had a stallion led forward; it instantly reared and advanced on its hind-legs, with its shoed forefeet in the air, flying mane and fiery eyes, roaring loudly, straight at the spot where the ambassadors stood, while at the same time a cannon was fired! It had the desired moral effect.

If we had had pictorial representations by the Mexicans of their first impression of the horse, or could only realize their conception—a pity we cannot, for *that is how it looks!*

Cortes and his band of young hidalgos and desperadoes

had some fun out of that incident! When the place where the messengers had stood was empty, the natives swept away from it as though by a waterspout, they must have burst into their loud peals of laughter. Cortes twirled his moustaches sky-high, one in each hand, and nearly fell backwards with swagger, cocking his legs and strutting. Oh, ho, ho, they knew the tricks! Alvarado, how he laughed! Alvarado, that great tall favourite of fortune, the darling of the expedition, the darling of the chroniclers ever since, and of all his fellows the one the Mexicans observed, feared and admired most; for he was quite fair, a giant with a head made up of gold and sunshine, of pure Gothic blood; they called him *Tonatiuh*, Son of the Sun, and were above all inclined to take him for Quetzalcoatl or his descendant, though he was not the actual leader. He was a mighty soldier and a fountain of mirth, the songster of the camp and the one who led the chorus of laughter when wit took fire, and be sure the jesting was of the strongest. Of Alvarado history has left us a long, exciting romance, tearing up and down, now bright-coloured, now clouded, but always heroic and stirring—his women a separate chapter; by his precipitancy he came near upsetting the whole conquest of Mexico, but he shines for all time through the personal bravery he displayed; he afterwards became the conqueror of Guatemala.

After the episode of the stallion, which happened not long after Cortes had landed on the coast, a personage came upon the stage who was to play a decisive part in the conquest of Mexico; a woman, Doña Marina, or, as she was generally called, Malina. She arrived among the Spaniards as one of the female slaves sent by the terrified embassy for the mollification of the strangers, but she was an Aztec by birth and therefore valuable as an interpreter

and spy when the Spaniards came up on to the plateau and began to march against Tenochtitlan. She is reported to have been very beautiful and intelligent at the same time, was soon personally attached to Cortes as his secretary and had a son by him, proof that gods and mortals are capable of crossing; soon the country was overrun with demigods.

In contradistinction to other heroic women known to history—Judith, Ildico—who sacrificed themselves for the salvation of their people by delivering themselves into the power of the enemy, she indeed gave herself up, but only to betray the people she belonged to; clearly it was a new world that the strangers had come to.

We shall not judge her; only a woman is permitted to annihilate a whole population—she can produce a new one. Nature manifests itself in her deeds—keep her bound! Bound Malina had been, but the worm of chance had eaten through her bonds, and now she was free, let loose between two powers which were approaching each other as a lava-stream approaches a tidal wave; let loose indeed, a demon stretching its serpent's belly and throbbing with destruction, naked and drenched with love, in the bare glory of her tropical body, as though made of copper, and one or two parrot's feathers in her hair, delighting in her soul over slaughter—the obscure, self-destroying soul of her people.

She led Cortes into Tenochtitlan, interpreted to him what her countrymen said—Spanish she had learnt from Cortes' lips—she mixed among the Aztecs and ferreted out their plans, disclosed them in good time to Cortes and thus gave him all the trumps in his hand. Woman's most astonishing talent, that of listening, of being everywhere with ear and mind and catching all that is in the air, this she had to an astonishing degree. What if she had used it to

betray the speech of Cortes and his friends, for the good of those in Tenochtitlan, her own blood, her family and relations among them? No, all there is to be said is that that was not Malina's way, for such was her love of Cortes.

And so she nosed in and out, lovely and deadly, like the reinforced blending of the qualities of serpent and beast of prey which is peculiar to the weasel, the ferret and the ocelot. And every time Cortes clearly manifested the powers of a god by knowing beforehand all the plans of the Aztecs, their thoughts almost; it was she, their own flesh and blood, who was the power within his power! And it was part of her voluptuousness to lay her whole people at his feet, every man of them, torn and bleeding. How she must have loved him! Bernal Diaz says that Cortes was rather knock-kneed. Before setting out on this expedition he decked himself as leader with a plume in his helm and a medal on his breast, anticipated honours; many other things might be dug up to Cortes' disadvantage, but we are constrained to leave them alone and say that he had the love of Malina.

If the Aztecs were thus scared to their very souls by the firearms and horses of the Spaniards, not to mention their divine origin, there were also things on the side of the Mexicans which impressed Cortes. Not their numbers or their hideous war-paint and uncivilized weapons, the fact of being opposed by hosts of a thousand to one, the air full of obsidian-tipped arrows, an enemy that fought with broken glass, and howling, like a tidal wave of shrieking souls washed up from hell—none of these things got on Cortes' nerves. But they were cannibals!

Cortes was genuinely scandalized in his religious feelings. One of the first things that had happened on their march

from the coast up into the hills was that a cacique, devout in his own way, had caused some fifty prisoners to be slaughtered, and offered the white gods cakes dipped in their blood; Cortes had been genuinely offended. An unchristian thing, the grossest of all sins, though not mentioned among the deadly sins of Holy Church—its possibility had never been imagined; Cortes positively developed theological skill on the question of anthropophagy and felt that he had an official mission to make an end of this abominable heresy, by all the force of arms if necessary (the symbol of the Host did not occur to him). From a purely personal point of view Cortes was repelled by this form of bloodshed, even to feeling ashamed of humanity; it gave the great strong man emotions he could scarcely control, of a purely nervous nature, like a woman when she sees a spider crawling; he got creeps, huh, huh, talked in falsetto and was a prey to fits of debility which only a refreshing day on the battlefield with stacks of Indians mown down by the guns was able to dispel.

This feeling remained fresh during the whole campaign, nay, it increased in strength the more examples of the Aztecs' gruesome degradation came to his knowledge. In the same proportion the Mexicans lost their awe of the white strangers. The glad tidings that this was the expected coming of Quetzalcoatl nobody could continue to take seriously—superstition that; whether they were Teules or not was doubtful; many had already come to the conclusion that they were quite ordinary, dirty, rapacious men. The horses that they had feared so much were the first cause of their mortal nature being revealed; they managed to kill a few of them; the Spaniards buried the first ones, lest the truth should come out, but it came out.

Later, things were found on the Aztecs' altars which they

had offered to their gods in the first days of the war, amongst them a horseshoe, a Flemish hat and a letter, things which in a strangely living way bring us near to both parties; it was not to remain at that.

But even after Cortes and his men had lost the advantage of being regarded as supernatural, they still had much in reserve, their frightfulness as men.

To Cortes' mission as an apostle of the Faith was added the overwhelming impression he gained of the wealth of Mexico, whereby we do not mean in the first instance its natural resources, but portable property. This came when Montezuma was civil enough to send him presents even as he was marching on the city; trifles scarce worthy of a god's acceptance, as the ambassadors politely expressed it, but in the eyes of the Spaniards fortunes in gold and precious stones, besides works of art, which were ordered to be beaten flat and melted down on the spot. But if *that* was a modest sample—what treasures of Golconda might they not expect to find in the city itself! And they were right.

The Aztecs' fate was sealed.

VII

THE EAGLE AND THE SERPENT

THE most ancient symbol of the Aztecs, which was connected with the founding of Tenochtitlan, the place of the cactus rock, was a rock on which just enough mould had collected for the cactus to grow; on the cactus sat an eagle, and in its beak it held a serpent; the natural features of the Mexican plateau summed up in an image.

On the spot where the first Aztecs saw this sign they had built their pueblo. After the arrival of the Spaniards they might have extended this totem to signify their fate, in a dramatic sense, a duel to the death. To this day it is the national standard of Mexico: the Eagle and the Serpent united and combining their forces.

But the epoch of Cortes was typified by the eagle swooping down upon the rattlesnake with beak and claw.

The conquest of Mexico is known to all, in its several data: how Cortes advanced on to the plateau, the conspiracy of Cholula, Malina's service and the massacre, the entrance into Mexico and Montezuma's captivity in his own city, the parenthesis with Narvaez and Alvarado's doubtful conduct in Mexico during the absence of Cortes, the revolt, Montezuma's death and the disastrous retreat from Mexico, the return and the siege, the sacrifice of the Spanish prisoners, the famine among the natives, and finally their surrender. All this we have in lengthy descriptions, losing in rapidity of action the more they are detailed.

With due respect to the true sequence of events, our memory, our inner eye, pictures the conquest of Mexico in foreshortening, a free consideration of the characters as they develop in one place, no matter whether events chanced to come before or after, the law of the drama; we see these protagonists before us, Cortes and Montezuma, Malina, Alvarado, Sandoval and other heroes, Huitzilopochtli and his repulsive priests, the harrowing night when Spaniards and Mexicans fought together in the gloomy cannibal city floating on causeways in a salt lake like a Venice of the Underworld—the threescore naked, shivering Europeans who were sacrificed up on Huitzilopochtli's teocalli, in full view of all the survivors—what a panopticon! Burning altars, burning houses, the whole scene shown up by fire, and in the background Popocatepetl in the burning sky, fire above fire!

And the piece may begin quite chronologically with the conspiracy, with Montezuma in the foreground, in person, not hiding in the wings, and the scene Tenochtitlan; the massacre we can lump together with Alvarado's massacre, and assign the butcheries, multiplied by two, to the great spring festival, historically enough as regards the second; the rest, the great fight in the city, the storming of the temples, the retreat, the sacrifices, the investment and starvation, we can present in rapid acts succeeding or jostling one another.

Well then: the Spring Festival. It was celebrated with remarkable ancient rites, a young Aztec being chosen for his strength and beauty, proclaimed as a god and married to four of the most beautiful maidens in the country, whereafter the honeymoon was solemnized with all possible luxury and magnificence for twenty days, a symbol of

fertility and of the return of spring with all its gifts. On the twenty-first day the festival took on a more general character; all the young men and maidens dressed themselves in holiday attire, gorgeous cloaks of quetzal-feathers with jewels and gold on their limbs, spring made visible, and in a great solemn procession, so sacred that no other public act, not even war, might take place on that day, they accompanied the young family, the god and his brides, across the great square in the centre of Tenochtitlan and up all the steps to the top of the great temple. Here all knelt and worshipped the young god, in whose form Tezcatlipoca himself was presumed to have taken up his abode. Thereupon he was handed over to the priests, sacrificed and slain; his heart was thrown into the golden incense-bowl before the image of the god, and his limbs were delivered to the congregation, to be devoured amid dancing and song.

But all is not as it should be at this festival, it is destined to be interrupted before it can be brought to a harmonious conclusion. The young caciques marching in the procession, the flower of the Aztec nobility, in precious garments of feathers, and with old hereditary emeralds, do they look as unconcerned and innocent as is fitting at a festival of joy? Put your hand on their hearts and perhaps you will feel something hard; for what purpose do they carry the macquauitl under the very raiment of innocence? Dark is the Mexican by nature, but if you look around in the teeming streets of the pueblo, you will notice perhaps that to-day they are more than usually dark, with lips drawn in and eyes like their own muddy lake.

There is one who reads all these faces like an open book, Cortes; for he knows the cipher, and it is Malina who has given it him. She has been quietly at work, at night, naked as a snake round all the holes and corners of the

pueblo, using her ears here, playing the wide-mouthed native woman there, within hearing of a couple of distinguished old caciques; all the disguise she needs is to make herself suitably ugly, not an easy thing for this glaring flame of a woman, but she manages it; in the likeness of a perfectly doltish slave she carries water in and out of the inner sanctuaries of the highest priestly initiates; she is with Montezuma without his suspecting it, a meeting more secret than the abyss; therefore it is that Cortes is so all-knowing, and his lip curls so grimly under the moustache, inscrutable to all . . . what preparations has not *he* been making in the profoundest secrecy!

A notable trio indeed, as they stand there in a mannerly group to watch the spring-time pass in gay and joyous procession—Cortes, Montezuma and Malina. Cortes iron-clad from head to foot in honour of the feast, full dress, with his sweaty soldier's nose sniffing out of his helmet; Montezuma plainly dressed with only a few jewels; as the chief man of the realm he has no need of magnificence, and he is in mourning, for though, of course, he stands here as a free man, the object of the deepest obeisances, he knows he is a prisoner; finally Malina, with feathers on her head and a little apron of humming-bird feathers in open-work. The three can only bestow courtly smiles on one another, gracious and mincing, as they stand there knowing what the other knows; that is to say, Cortes and Malina know what Montezuma knows, and look him in the face when he speaks with an air of frankness—but *he* doesn't know that artillery is posted all round the square, and grimy gunners match in hand, and that cavalry, men in the saddle, drawn swords and all, are waiting behind the doors, which are ready to swing open. . . .

Then it is that the three princely spectators, around

whom a courteous distance has hitherto been preserved, seem to become the centre of a circle which draws ever closer, composed as it happens entirely of very tall Aztecs, warlike in appearance, but, of course, unarmed, only in long, voluminous cloaks. . . .

How pleasant on a festal day like this to be able to put away all thoughts of bloodshed and abandon oneself entirely to the confidence one feels in an honourable prince, says Cortes with a bow, as he looks Montezuma in the face, purring through his moustache. He puts his face so close to Montezuma's that the Emperor shrinks back a little as he nods confirming the truth of the remark.

But Cortes comes still closer with his big, sweaty face, and there is a glint of steel in those prominent, audacious blue eyes. He drops his voice and adds another sentence or two, which appear to have a deadly effect upon Montezuma. The life ebbs out of him, his eyes, his features, his frame; he is a dead man, as one is who has betrayed and failed, and is told it to his face by his enemy.

Yes, Cortes tells him in a few dry words that he knows all his schemes, the conspiracy against his life which is ripe for this very moment . . . and by his side Malina crouches, leaning forward so that Montezuma may see her face. He turns yet greyer, for now he knows her, by a gleam she puts into her eyes, so that he remembers her and the night, and how he disclosed all, and in an instant he sees the whole wretchedness of his situation.

Cortes still holds him as though spitted on his gaze, with his face close to his—Eagle and Serpent!—but then he gives over his features entirely to cruelty, draws himself up and throws his gloved hand in the air. A band of disguised Tlascalans, his allies, who have been spread about among the crowd, fall upon certain of the Aztecs, the conspiring

caciques and high chieftains, eloquently disclosing the weapons concealed beneath their cloaks—within an hour they are burnt alive at the stake, with a fire of native arrows and spears, a very brisk blaze, under them.

But Cortes' raised hand is a sign for more than that—all at once the cannons thunder from every side, the houses open like yawning mouths, and slowly Alvarado rides out, like a shining tower of steel, man and horse in one, swaying rhythmically up and down, and behind him all the cavalry with closed visors and bright gleaming swords in the air. And now the soldier in Cortes takes fire, now the general is ready for action; with his left hand he closes his helm, and with his right he draws his long singing sword from its sheath, spitting between hand and hilt—*Iago!* A loud, piercing scream is heard at his side, like a leaping ocelot; it is Malina giving vent to her rapacious heart.

Alarum. Volleys of guns and muskets, the twang of cross-bows, cavalry charges, and all the daintily adorned spring procession, the pick of the country's youth, lies swimming in its blood; the god who was to be sacrificed so prettily to himself is knocked down with his flowery wreaths about his head and trodden out of recognition under the horses' hoofs; bloody furrows are ploughed through the tightly packed crowds in the streets, so easily swept from the square; shrieks, curses and death.

And then an ominous pause, a hundred thousand souls hold their breath in horror at what has happened and what there may be to come.

The results: the revolt, the rising of the whole of Mexico, not the nobles this time but the people, whipped up by the priests, the holy war of extermination against this vermin that pretended to be gods and had seized upon

the pueblo in order to snatch up all the gold and run away with it. Until now they had put up with all their shamelessness, their desecration of the gods' holy places where they had raised their own torture stake, for no other reason but that Montezuma in his indulgence had taken their part, he whom they had treated like an Indian, and in whose person they had for ever violated the ancient sacred royal house of the Aztecs root and branch, the dignity of the divine king; now there should be an end of that.

The gods were exasperated to the utmost, Huitzilopochtli sweated cold fire at night in his sanctuary, the priests said; he was phosphorescent, and the sacrificial blood on his flanks was alive; Popocatepetl himself, as every one could see, was moved and would soon destroy the world. The omens pointed to the last day being at hand, a three-year-old child which had been sacrificed had babbled prophecies before its death in a language nobody understood; in the stomach of another victim they had found a stone shaped like many-branched lightning; a condor flying from the east had dropped carrion on Huitzilopochtli's teocalli . . . was further evidence required? Mexico's fate was uncertain—but these foreign impostors who had stolen the thunder and in whom everything was false, even to the colour of their skins, should die, even if it cost a thousand Mexicans for every one of the palefaces they made an end of!

The rising came at dawn; notwithstanding all other Powers, they would now have the Sun himself in their company; before sunrise a sound as of cockchafers in a sack arose from Mexico, the ardent whispering of a whole population—and that day, when the sun had reached the zenith, a vast pillar of dust and roaring seemed to rise up towards it, broad as the whole city of Mexico; all the

countless hosts of the city attacked the palace, where the few whites had at once barricaded themselves—a rain of stones, obsidian arrows, fire-hardened stakes and spears, bare hands, teeth if they got near enough; thousands dropped before the cannons and the tireless Toledo blades, forming heaps in front of the palace, but other thousands came on, and that with a ceaseless shouting, roaring and howling from a multitude of throats, from the moment the sun rose, without cessation all through the day, calculated to scare the enemy—and it scared them.

The situation of the invested Spanish force, now with Narvaez' troops fully 1200 men, 6000 Tlascalans and 80 horses, was indeed desperate; the whole country rose against them, it was as though the earth opened wherever they looked and gave forth Mexicans, in black waves, host upon host of death-defying savages dressed like devils in the skins of beasts and feathers, rolling on towards the palace, howling, yelling and with a devilish ear-splitting noise behind them of terrifying instruments, drums, an inferno of pipes with four holes which screeched uninterruptedly hour after hour, grooved antelope-horns which were scraped with mussel-shells, a music invented by Satan.

Blood ran that day in rivers through the streets of Mexico. Flaming arrows penetrated the palace and set fire to the woodwork, many Spaniards fell, however many lives they took themselves. The howling and the infernal music exhausted the brain, not every one kept up his heroic spirit; the soldiers of Narvaez sat idly and began to ask why they should die to make Cortes' fortune—disorder even in their own lines.

When the position became untenable Cortes made a sally with his bravest,—Alvarado, Sandoval, Olid, all sportsmen

to whom fighting was an art,—and together they stormed Huitzilopochtli's temple, an impossible thing, seeing that the pyramid was black from top to bottom, on all its hundred and fourteen terraces, with Mexican warriors, who flung down blazing timbers upon the attackers; they *took* the temple, after three hours of acrobatics and slaughter, set fire to the towers on the top, and—then Huitzilopochtli came!

The Mexicans saw him come out of his sanctuary like a toad out of its hole, but in a recumbent position, how now—the Spaniards were behind him, rolling him along; out he came in his square block over the edge of the topmost platform, and down he thundered squarely over all the steps, taking a dozen at a jump, knocking holes in the masonry and a corner off himself, smoking with a breath of thunder, and finally crushing a group of red-jerkined priests who stood howling at the foot of the pyramid!

A mighty exploit, the fall of Mexico underlined—but a piece of bravado; the Mexicans themselves were not dead yet, they came and continued to come, one black wave out of another like the smoke of a conflagration, shooting, stabbing, yelling, not a Spaniard but was wounded; what could be done?

An appeal to the people, through Montezuma himself, was attempted; he had power over them after all, and was induced to go out on the roof and get them to listen to reason. A great moment; the noise actually stopped for a few minutes and gave place to a stillness never known before, when Montezuma showed himself and the crowds saw him they had regarded as the highest and most dignified of all men. He spoke, a single thin human voice was heard amid the ocean of silence, with thousands of lowering eyes directed upon him.

But he had no answer. Stones answered him, arrows and stones; wounded and bleeding, Montezuma staggered and had to be led away.

No, he had no answer. For he was no longer Montezuma. They had torn him out of their hearts. The Council, the ancient power in the land, had met and declared his hereditary rights forfeit; he was a nobody now, and in his stead Guatemozin, the next-of-kin, had been proclaimed God's deputy and leader of the armies.

Then Cortes himself tried to appeal to the people. After the fall of the temple he went up on to the roof with Malina, his interpreter, obtained silence, a silence of death, and spoke to the people; no mild words of peace and conciliation, which was what he desired, but the cold anticipations of the general, designed for moral effect:

Now they could see for themselves, their temple destroyed, their gods reduced to dust, how could they think of resisting him? Amicably, such and such terms; with continued resistance, not one stone left upon another in Mexico!

And these harsh words were translated by Malina into flute-like tones; the ocelot had the ear of the human ocean all to herself, and mewed out the utterances of the man of iron to the thousands of warriors, above whose heads the dust of war hovered in a cloud. She twisted her body charmingly and licked her pink lips, in feathers for the occasion, but with the gleam of her copper limbs shining through like a lavish fire, a willing and voluptuous echo of Cortes' destroying words.

They gave him an answer, some old cacique or other acted as spokesman and spoke very plainly, to the effect that in a short time they would have no more food, that most of them were wounded and patched up—and moreover

the bridges on the causeways were broken, they needn't think they could get away!

It was true.

After the pause, drums, pipes, antelope-horn rattles and a hundred thousand howling, yelling Aztecs: the burial chorus started again and would not stop until the funeral was over. And what graves to end in!

Meanwhile Montezuma died. A blow to Cortes, for even if he was now quite out of favour he must have a party and might have been used again. But they could not keep life in him; he tore off his bandages, would not eat, preserved an obstinate silence, with downcast eyes, from the time he was stoned by his own people until his death. The chronicler notes that he refused to kiss the crucifix!

If Columbus was the most disappointed man in history, Montezuma rivalled him in a way; both of them had a great and genuine hope of seeing God, and one of them found a cannibal, the other Cortes.

The night after Montezuma's death Cortes commenced the retreat.

It was the famous night of sorrow, indelicately referred to by Diaz as the night when they were thrown out of Mexico. On this occasion he had an experience he had never known before, and of which he had never imagined the possibility—he was *afraid*. Yes, he mentions the fact with surprise and in remarkable terms, almost as though fear were some kind of horrible creature outside himself with which he here became acquainted. So terrible was the night.

With scattered features and incidents brought together in foreshortening the night appears thus—Popocatepetl in the leading part:

He stands flickering in his heaven, lost in his own glowing dreams, with his own long time, and in one of his instants, when he shoots up fire and lays bare the whole plateau beneath him in the gleam, a land of lava with black shadows, and a salt lake with heavy, sluggish waters, in the lake a city, seemingly caked together with blood and lime—in such an instant it is that they fight and make history down there, Eagle and Serpent, a duel in the air, the bird of prey has the reptile in its claws, and the snake writhes and tries to get at its breast with its poison-fang.

Cortes waited for the darkest hour of midnight, as far as it could be dark in Tenochtitlan with its hundreds of flaming altars, before he set out, with artillery, horses and all, his whole train and all his men, a special detachment to carry the great wooden bridge they had built in all secrecy to lay across the gap in the causeway.

It was this gap of sorrow that separated them from the dry land; here was the fighting, and here they suffered their losses, with the burning city at their back and the Mexicans after them on the causeway, the lake black with their canoes; for they had word of the departure only too soon, and set fire to everything that would burn in the city to show the enemy the way home, came after him with yells and roars and sharp spears, a whole world of splintered glass; and once more the Spaniards had to cut into them and keep them off rank by rank, while everlastingly fresh ranks and more canoes dashed up.

A frightful night. Some got across, then the bridge gave way; a living mush of men struggled in the water, drowned, were slaughtered; the gap was filled up with the guns and the sinking baggage, high enough for a few more to make their way across, last of the rearguard Alvarado, who

jumped over; impossible, declares the sober Bernal Diaz, but to this day everybody says he did it; over he came.

Yes, down in the muddy bottom of the lake lay all the good guns. The greater part of all Cortes' gold, in chests and boxes, found there a safe deposit for eternity; a terrible pity, the sun and moon in heavy chased gold, as big as wheels, bars enough to build a little house, cast from all the art treasures of Tenochtitlan; precious stones to an untold amount. Only the melancholy songs of the Spanish homeland were capable of giving utterance to such a grief. Yes, they lost all. Yet one long chest was saved of the baggage, it *had* to come through—Cortes had put it in charge of his most trusted porters and given it an escort of his keenest blades; in it Malina was concealed, packed away in feathers like a jewel, a fortune in quetzal-feathers at any rate; we may guess her dreams were warm ones if she slept through the trip.

Malina survived the horrors of the night. Apart from her the Spaniards lost all their slaves, male and female; Montezuma's children, who were with the baggage, were slain. All but twenty of the horses perished. Diaz drops a tear over Alvarado's sorrel mare; she must have been worth it. We hear of one other woman being saved, the only Castilian woman who was ever with the expedition, according to Diaz, by name Maria de Estrada—street? platform?—and a remarkable woman she was, fought like a man on the causeway with a two-handed sword, and came through alive. What a woman! Imagine her experiences!

Seven hundred Spaniards perished that night, drowned or slain, some taken prisoner, nameless most of them, and yet every single one had once been swung up to the ceiling by his mother, a cherub in swaddling-clothes, growing

up into a vagabond and soldier of fortune, to end here like chopped straw. But there were also grandees and caballeros among the fallen, Cortes' best friends and supporters, never, never to be forgotten!

The sacrifices: the poor, hapless ones who fell alive into the hands of the Aztecs and were slaughtered to the gods; white men, Christians, ah, their eyes mirrored the greatest horror ever seen, Tenochtitlan's night; they alone of all men knew what it was to go with open eyes, with all their wits about them, straight into Hell!

Their fellows on the causeway saw them being led naked up all the terraces of the temple, round and round, the whole way up, in a glare bright as daylight from burning altars, burning houses, while distant bursts of flame and lightning flashes from Popocatepetl flickered across the whole sky. Ay, up they had to go, the steep sacred way of the Mexicans, the symbol of the nation's wanderings, from the tropics up the ladder of the zones to the roof of the world, into a rarer air; the doomed white men were forced to pace it, with lash and stab, pinioned like sheep, and from the causeway and the shores of the lake their white bodies could be seen shining among black and red devils, the red priests in their robes of office, sacrificial jerkins, flowing hair—the young white-skinned sons of Spain, with their blue blood, *sangre azul,* showing through the skin like a map of fair rose-pink river-valleys, the skin of their exquisite mothers, milk of their milk—and when they appeared on the platform they were forced to dance before the altar of jasper, Huitzilopochtli's stone sacrifice; he himself was absent for the moment, but represented by his priests!

Face to face with them, the priests of Huitzilopochtli, they were brought, aloft on the top of the pyramid, as

though in the air, with night and fire below, night and fire above their heads, the mountain brooding over the world like an evil red eye, and around them a pack of joyful tormentors, in garments as of clotted blood, vultures with befouled drooping wings, their hair matted with blood, long nails, most of them earless, clucking like birds and clinking their obsidian knives together. A clatter of cauldrons, forks and huge ladles down in the forecourt; flutes, antelope-horn rattles—the drum!

The great death-drum! Ay, to-night it sounded, from the top of Huitzilopochtli's temple, the doomsday drum, made of the skins of anacondas and audible for miles over the country as a deep bellowing, a sluggish, fearful pulse in the night, boom—boom! Down in the city the women, alone at home on this night of conflict, came out of doors and smeared blood on the mouth of the serpent totem on the wall of the house, when they heard the snake-drum, conjuring up the oldest, profoundest symbols of Mexico.

To the booming of this voice from the Abyss the doomed Spaniards went to their death. And all the images of death were before their eyes, the place of skulls below the temple lighted up by the fire, the scaffolding of bones, the elaborately built-up mounds of death's-heads, dried mummy heads stuck on stakes, an abyss as though paved with up-turned faces, the grinning, naked human form . . . truly this was the Underworld itself!

The young Spanish noble . . . now they had hold of him, came close to him with the bestial warmth of their bodies, forced their way into his soul with their grins, the dogs; now they broke down his bearing, stretched him in a ridiculous posture, now they cut him open—ah well, that only hurt—but then they laid hold of his heart, then they laid hold of his heart!

Boom—boom!

And when his ears rang in the last lulling, when he began to be alone in a friendly darkness—why, then let the drum go on, let the rest be accomplished, hell for hell, let it bustle and boil over down in the priests' kitchens, let the vultures scream from the gods' aviaries, where the great birds fan together darkness and fiery gleam under their wings, let it snarl and hiss from the menageries, where puma and jaguar pad softly up and down and arch their backs, with yellow eyes watching for what their stinking keepers will bring, the ocelot pit like a snake-pen full of cats, marked like the boa and as noiseless, with the same narrow vertical pupil . . .

Splash, splash, sounded in the rattlesnake pit, as the entrails were flung to them, the share of the deadly grey serpent, and in the flickering light which crept in from a reflection in the sky, Popocatepetl's distant fires, a gliding life could be seen, scarcely to be distinguished from the dust underneath the fat, scaly reptiles; they came out of holes and corners, darting a dry tongue from their mouths, tasting the air, with scaly jaws and little enamel eyes, giving a faint rattle in the gloom, the castanets in their tail . . .

Boom—boom!

On the other side of the lake Cortes sat and listened to the ceaseless throbbing of the death-drum, saw the awful scene, recognized his friends in the distance. In the course of the night he had had heads flung at his feet by Aztecs infuriated to madness, the heads of his comrades; he saw them make that terrible progress, saw them die—and then Cortes wept, with a boy's hard, abandoned weeping that hurts the throat and strangles the breath, over the sufferings of his boys and brothers.

A creature stroked her head against him, rubbed her

ear on him, Malina, trying to console him, to make up to him for all his loss; but Cortes flicked her away like a grain of dust that had got into his tears; she could not help him.

No, there was only one thing that could help him, as time would show, that which he swore as he shook his fist at the flaming temples of Mexico—that he would see them razed to the ground, and all their foul butchers rotting corpses in the earth! Was that so strange an oath?

And it came to pass as he had sworn. With murder and manslaughter he was hunted out of Mexico, with siege and starvation he returned.

Better would it have been if Popocatepetl had buried Mexico and the whole plateau under a layer of ashes than that *that* should be seen which was seen in the streets of Mexico when it was at the last gasp and the mothers took back into themselves that to which they had given life, and Huitzilopochtli's priests in hunger delirium, when the last rattlesnake had been devoured, stole glances at each other —no hope left even if they ate each other, nothing left to eat on them, plucked living corpses of vultures, staggering with the last of their strength to the carrion-heap and falling dead on their faces in it.

To such extremes does one misdeed drive another.

At dawn one more last sacrifice took place up on the platform with the smoking ruins of its towers, after Huitzilopochtli's image, with immense toil, fury and triumph, had been dragged up all the steps, hundreds of men pulling at it, like a swarm of impassioned ants round a caterpillar, and set up in his place again somewhat battered, with a chip knocked out of his forehead and all the precious stones and ornaments broken or shaken out, but still Huit-

zilopochtli the ancient. They trembled before him, for the insult he had suffered, the revenge he might take—but had they not already avenged him pretty well? Mexico purified, the great and rare offerings he had received—and now he was to receive the last and best, if that was good enough, the white strangers' own god!

Just before sunrise this extraordinary sacrifice took place; the tall life-size crucifix, which the Spaniards had set up in the square before the palace where they had been lodged and from which they had been turned out, was borne in solemn procession round all the steps of the temple the whole way up to the platform.

Here the two gods were confronted with one another. They were left in each other's company a good while, even the priests withdrawing from the platform to the next step below, and thousands of Mexicans filled the remaining terraces, still mad with the night's orgy of slaughter, silent, glaring like wild cattle.

Well, then the gods had a chance of looking at each other and making some remarks; they might have a good deal to talk about, their passions, their impressions of mankind for a thousand years, and so on. But the gods were dumb.

It was as though they spoke in the language that was spread out before the eyes of all in the dawning, the earth hidden by corpses, half the pueblo fallen in like bakers' ovens after a shower of stones, black smoking logs all that was left of cedarwood timbers, whose perfume was changed to the sour smell of burning; the temple drenched in blood from the top step to the bottom and covered with dead bodies, like a mountain of corpses; the lake stained red far out from the shore, a vast raw scent of blood hanging over the earth as high as the top of the temple.

Underneath the huge drum the drummer lay dead, burst by his own fury, after having danced the whole night long like a devil about his doomsday drum, howling, in a hurricane of his hair, naked, with limbs like glowing copper; now he was cooled down, lying crumpled up on his drumstick like a man of ashes.

Sunrise! Silence! Far and wide the land and mountains stare out into the clear, light air of the plateau, the ring of heaven and earth uniting in the distance. Popocatepetl smokes up into the morning sky, and to-day his smoke is not black but white.

Silence! The gods stand face to face. They do not budge. Huitzilopochtli broad, short in the neck, with a piece chipped out of one eye, nose gone, a good deal knocked about, but still a black; the white god stiff and mute on his cross, in an everlasting agony: Man, after his own handling.

Then they set fire to the crucifix, and as the sun's eye appeared over the horizon it burned, with a pale fire rising straight up into the air.

But Huitzilopochtli was soon to travel down all those steps again, and this time he would be left standing on his head among ruins and rubble, until one day a later generation pulled him out and put him in a museum with a label on him, a piece of monstrous sculpture, for the ecstatic delight of those who recognize their own genius in negro fetishes, to others only the hideous image of a nightmare from which mankind has awakened. Where his temple was, now stands the Cathedral of Mexico; if fear is no longer to be worked upon there are feelings to answer the purpose.

A gleaming white dome of snow fills the extinct crater of Popocatepetl.

VIII

THE NEW WORLD

We came to Portorico's shore
And fought with cannibals full sore.
Chek, chekkelek . . .
(Teeth-chattering, castanets.)
To all our saints we prayed,
And scrap-iron in our gun we laid,
And shot and stabbed and hit around galore.
Ha, ha, ha!
(Chorus of howls.)
And then we got an appetite;
A curly maiden came in sight.
Chek, chekkelek . . .
The pot's just on the boil,
And in she goes with spice and oil.
Deep water makes you ready for a bite.
Ha, ha, ha!

A curly maiden's not so bad,
With skin and hair and all, my lad!
Chek, chekkelek . . .
Each epicure his taste—
Give me a cut from near the waist—
There's chops and steaks and brisket to be had!
Ha, ha, ha!

Then you can take a lily-white bone
To pick your tooth, the hollow one.
Chek, chekkelek . . .
Strike up a dead men's dance,
With skull and crossbones, now's your chance!
Come on, come on, don't let me dance alone!
Ha, ha, ha!

Our Eldorado's found, I guess,
Since we've tobacco in our mess.
Chek, chekkelek . . .
Strike up a firemen's jig,
And puff the smoke about your wig!
Cheers for tobacco, that's the weed we bless!
Ha, ha, ha!

With whip and loaded gun stand we
And make the slaves work busily—
Chek, chekkelek . . .
The black man he is black;
He gets the sun right on his back—
And that's what keeps the white man white, you see!
Ha, ha, ha!

Like stallions we rushed around
And women, lots of them, we found.
Chek, chekkelek . . .
Old Huitzli we defied—
But strange diseases here betide;
And now some noseless ones are homeward bound.
Ha, ha, ha!

I've had enough of going to sea,
It's making an old man of me.
Chek, chekkelek . . .
I'll see my girl again,
She'll meet her boy from off the main—
And she'll have been, let's hope, as true as we . . .
Ha, ha, ha!

COMPARATIVELY pretty cannibal chanties such as this and others not so nice, in the savages' own gibberish, were sung by the crews of the slave-ships which brought home gold from the West Indies and carried back cargoes of slaves from the Guinea Coast to the islands, to take the place of

the native population which was dying out in the mines. Two worlds had begun to infect one another.

Armies of men, whole populations, were ready to force their way over to the other side, now that an escape from Europe had been opened. A great liquidation was going on among prelates, princes and contentious theologians in Europe; the Church was going to pieces and losing its absolute power over men's souls, only to split up into several, equally intolerant; many whips in place of the great scourge. Crowned heads watched their opportunity and raked in estates which the Church could no longer keep hold of since it had become divided against itself. But two or three hundred years elapsed before this liquidation came to an end. And the common people, who found themselves in a tight place whatever happened, who got a Reformation but no reform; the peasants who were bound faster than ever after their flails had struck down one or two nobles and they had burnt a few castles; the surplus of the Middle Ages along the highways, beggars, discharged soldiers, an unthrifty but vigorous rabble—the common people could not wait, the discontented made for the coast and jumped at the bounty money, which men with raw gold on their fingers were offering in every port; the caravels put to sea loaded with men who had not yet become a class; but they were to become one.

Men like Rodrigo de Triana, the seaman who first saw land on board the *Pinta*, but did not get the promised annuity of 10,000 maravedis; he was discontented, furious, and his wrath lasted him his lifetime, however it was with his annuity. The Admiral got the money, he had seen the first light ashore that evening—ho, who was talking about seeing lights, it was land they were looking for! But the Admiral was within his rights, decided his own

case, strict justice, first is first! Rodrigo was wild all the rest of the voyage, and beside himself when six months later they came home and dazzled Spain with the mighty news.

While the Admiral was being honoured like a prince in Seville, and invited to attend their majesties' court at Barcelona—now the ex-cartographer was mounting, he was ennobled, had *always* been noble—Rodrigo raged over in his Triana and ran amuck through all the wineshops, from which *he* derived his extraction, banged all their tables and threatened the lives of inoffensive men, without harming a hair of their heads, with a dry sob in his throat, drunken laughter and shaking his head at his glass:

First is first! The great can do these things! Muck to the mucky! Saw a light in the dark—light in my breeches! Puerca Madoña!

Drunk and with drawn knife Rodrigo then reeled through the streets of Seville talking to himself aloud, hiccupping and with many an empty laugh, making way for himself with the edge of his hand, though he had the whole procession to himself—this was when he had heard the rumours of Columbus's triumphal progress through the whole of Spain, the mountebank shows with parrots and gold masks, and dyewoods, and bamboo, and the dozen poor savages with rings in their noses—a nice Spain *they* were shown, the whole of Christendom running after a handful of Indians!—and Columbus himself at the head, propped up aloft on a palfrey, which must have been rigged with a rudder aft so that he could steer it . . . for all this mummery and the honours and Columbus sitting on a chair with their majesties and his newly bought coat-of-arms and the gold chain on his neck and his going hunting with the King, for all this Rodrigo didn't give a blow!

Even the wall of the church came in for a share of his contempt!

But when rumours came thick and fast of the Admiral's glory—now he must be eating from the same dish as the King, and be sure they each stirred the soup well to scoop up the dumplings!—then Rodrigo lost all appetite in his native land and emigrated, stormed across to Africa. There he turned Mohammedan; Columbus might take his share of salvation too; a dirty lot of Christians, not another breath would he draw among the dogs!

To the day of his death Rodrigo stayed over in Africa, praising Allah in burnoose and turban, only to be distinguished from other Mussulmans by his wrathful blue eyes. A seaman's calling—Rodrigo spat on it! He broke stones for the rest of his days, and between spitting on his hands and punishing big blocks he shook a clenched fist northward at Europe over the water and gave vent to his feelings in Arabic—might the tongue shrivel up in his throat if his native speech ever crossed *his* lips again!

Such was the wrath of Rodrigo.

It was not America in his particular case, but it was for thousands of others, who without regret turned their backs on Europe for good.

First it was the Conquistadores and all their troop, Cortes and Pizarro, Diego Almagro, who conquered Chile, another man of iron with an uncommon keenness of character which reminds one of the Estremeños, the worst and the best qualities of Arab and Goth united; there were Ojeda, Alvarado; and with them the nameless armies that accompanied them. We may suppose that all Spain could show of old Northern descent, the seed of the Normans, the waggon-folk of the Migrations, the restless ones who at one

time had thrust to the South, that these were the first to seize the opportunity of moving on again, now that a Farther-off had been found. It was like a great Magnet Mountain overseas acting at a distance and drawing the nails out of Spain.

But after the discoverers and adventurers came the settlers. This was a slower movement, it was the foundation itself that was transferred; but there was no hurry about it, it is not finished yet.

And this is the great book of the Emigrants. The emigration was divided into two main streams: one from southern Europe which was to settle Latin America, Norman at the top, the Migrations filtered through the South, and Romance at the bottom; but the other later stream came from the North of Europe, the very source of the Migrations, and from it have come the United States.

Once more peasants committed themselves to the waves, nameless unknown bands, once more the emigrant's waggon creaked in new trackless regions, with children's faces looking out ahead from under the awning and long, worn handles of farm implements projecting behind, the plough on its travels again. And once more peasants drew up their waggons in a ring at night, with the cattle inside, a camp-fire and a frugal supper under the open sky, while round about lay the strange and hostile wilderness and a stealthy, powerful and cruel native population: the romance of the Red Indian, with all its bloody and fanatical chapters, the arrow quivering in the awning of the emigrant waggon, the frontiersman's long rifle bringing down the feathered horsemen at impossible ranges, Daniel Boone and the Last of the Mohicans; California—a trumpet-call no longer ago than when our fathers were young! Klondyke—our own fanfares!

A mighty, many-coloured, stirring book! What did they not see, the men who saw the vast young countries, coasts, prairies and mountains, immense rivers, cordilleras, tropical forests, pampas, for the first time! Overwhelmingly the thought forces itself upon us: never, never again will the world be so fresh! Not again will the world renew itself! Childhood lost! Manhood lost!

The poor "prairie schooner" that rocked its way west and made ruts for the first time on untrodden soil, with the elements of a home and of a population within; long-haired, wrinkled, resolute men on horseback surrounding it rifle in hand, and the outline of a mounted Indian far away by a steep pass—well, now the long trains are running there between the Atlantic and Pacific, and from the stern and silent emigrant has come America's robust farmer, the millions who feed millions.

Wide is the shade of Ygdrasil, the Tree of the Migrations, with its root in the North and fresh branches spreading over all the world!

Plants and animals move on and change their places, are given or deprived of a destiny; as though by some unexampled natural catastrophe the North American bison is wiped out from the continent and the ancient domestic cattle of Europe come in. The horse is put ashore, the first ones from the cramped caravels of the discoverers, where they have stood for months in a swinging stall, turning the whites of their eyes upon a desert of waves, kicked and banged at the woodwork, and foaled, long-legged shaggy foals that the waves throw down every time they try to stand up—but at last a gangway is put ashore for them, which the creatures refuse to go down; they throw up their heads and make a great to-do, have to be forced

ashore, but then there they are! The prairie! Do they remember that they have been there before? Oh no, that is at least a geological period ago, they remember nothing; but how they shake their heads now that they feel soil under their hoofs, with flying manes, hindquarters in the air and lashing out with pleasure!

Thus they trot into the new world and put their muzzles to its pastures, stamping its soil with the mark of the heart from their feet, from the northern-most North America right round the curve of the globe to the southernmost Patagonia; galloping and neighing and turning back into wild horses, a whole continent bred full from a few pairs; the mustang's swift career, for a time free as the air, but lassoed again and bitted, bucking and kicking but spurred and broken, much ridden, petted and glorious!

The sheep comes over, even with Columbus, and trips ashore with its little hoofs, shakes its tail and drops its marks of habitation on the smallholder's field, has its spring lambs here again and shivers once a year when shorn for man's benefit, chews the cud sideways and stamps its forefoot with frightful peremptoriness when any one comes near its tether, just as in the old world—honour to simplicity! But here the sheep becomes a gregarious and mountain animal again, sharing the soil with the llama and alpaca on more highlands, stony prairies and borderlands than can be numbered.

Wheat comes over, in exchange for maize, which makes its way to Europe with its long straw and fertile cob; all the wheat in Mexico is said to come from two grains which a negro found in a sack of rice, as early as the days of Cortes. From some pips Bernal Diaz planted behind a temple are descended all the orange trees of Mexico. Life

and nourishment take up but little room and are so ready to replenish the earth, only asking to be lost in the soil and forgotten.

In some remote upland of Chile or Peru, no one has yet discovered where, there grew a nightshade which preserved its life in time of menace by stored-up nutriment in tubers at its root, the *potato!*

Another sallow nightshade, tobacco, acquired a power above all other plants on earth, although it is anything but nourishing, makes a man cowardly and shortens his life; man's inherent craving to multiply his being with poisons and widen his experience, by sickness if need be, holds a protecting hand over it. Chocolate, sweets came in; teeth went out. The barndoor fowl to the new world; the turkey to the old.

But how did things go with the natives? Not well. In countries where a population had spread to the limits it required, and where so many fresh millions came in, somebody had to give way. The natives gave way, they politely died out. Even the Conquistadores could see with their own eyes how places were emptying, and like good economists they replenished them with fresh hands, an island of exiled Africa, which spread and spread beyond the sea.

The weak people of the tropics went out first; they could not share the land with Spaniards, even shook their heads when referred to a life to come, if they were allowed to live here. It is related of a certain Hatuey, a cacique of Cuba, who was burnt alive, that when they wanted to force baptism and grace upon him before his death he inquired whether the Whites also went to Heaven; on hearing that they did he preferred fire to water and went un-

absolved to the stake. The Indian farther north withdrew in sinister silence.

The cannibal went out. Of the happy islanders nothing was left but Famine, a lean shadow on the top of a pile of skulls, grinning at *Hope*, which was hanging opposite from a palm tree.

Nor did all the Conquistadores have the same luck; conscience, or Nemesis, struck some of them, or they simply met with a brawler's end; most of them died a violent death.

A sigh of atonement reaches us from the brilliant and admired Alvarado. He met his death on an expedition to California, in an athletic style worthy of him. In scaling a mountain to capture a native stronghold the path was so steep that the horsemen fell from it, and Alvarado got one of them on his head, avoided horse and man but was hit by a piece of rock which they brought down and which broke every bone in his body. He lived for several days, and is said to have wept over all his transgressions, his acts of thoughtlessness and injustice against the natives. One day, when the crushed and contrite man was sighing with more resignation than usual, he replied to a friend who asked him where he felt most pain: *el alma*, in the soul; and in his last will he provided that all the savages he had branded and enslaved should be set free. Thus died Alvarado, in torment, a good lad.

But that did not bring back to life the hundreds of thousands whom other Spaniards in a bestial tropical frenzy had burnt, flayed, infected with Europe, flogged to death in the mines and destroyed.

But the trouble lay deeper than ordinary malignity and callousness; Nature had here brought together creatures incapable of mixing; of the same origin, but at a primitive

stage on one side, the other changed beyond all return; they might meet, but could no longer be grafted on one another, one side had to eclipse the other.

Primitive and civilized man had come too far away from each other. The former's state of innocence was doubtful enough, already marked by the beginning of a culture, cruelty conscious and intensified; but how were they to overtake the Whites in the arts of destruction? They, the Christians, had plenty of soul, self-knowledge enough, a noble conception of God—were they the better for it? With the growth of civilization *all* qualities grow, including brutality; even fatuity, callousness and lack of judgment manifest themselves on a grand scale. No, simple savages and the lords of creation, who had parted with their natural disposition, could not understand one another.

Not everywhere was the barrier so insurmountable; in Mexico a crossing took place which has held its own. The incipient culture there! Malina's forces!

But farther north the white man took land for himself and himself alone, claiming latitudes which were his own at home. It was as though Columbus only opened up America at second-hand to those whose instinct had been at work in him, the Northerners; from a point in his rear these races set out to found the America which is *America*, the States.

Here, on new soil and for a long time unnoticed, liberty grew up, which had become homeless in Europe, the ancient independence of the peasant.

And when it was strong enough it was able to turn back to the old world and show its light there; when the Republic, the pristine national form of the West, was reintro-

duced in France, the infection came from the young American Union.

The yeomen transplanted, a new root for the race, generation after generation of nameless families hidden here on their sovereign farms, from the hereditary homesteads in the old country to the new free land in the West—that was the true line in Columbus's instinct as Ferryman. What was perverted in him avenged itself in his life and upon his successors.

If it came to the ears of Rodrigo de Triana it must have consoled him that Columbus's glory was so short-lived. For King Ferdinand soon elbowed the "Viceroy" out of all his rights in the newly discovered countries. To follow the course of Nemesis: four hundred years later America drove Spain out of her overseas possessions; Columbus avenged.

But the holy Christophorus, if he could have seen the fate of Columbus and his successors, would assuredly have pointed with his big numbed finger to the dynasty of the discoverer, which died out in a single generation, the race decaying almost at once in the atmosphere of power, pomp and vexation of spirit.

BOOK THREE
THE PHANTOM SHIP

I

PHILIPPA

BUT what of the country Christopher Columbus sought after, unofficially, for his fleets were always fitted out for *India;* but the country that was the source of all his passion, what of that?

Well, it is still to be found; the Admiral wants to get away, he is lying sick in Valladolid and has no time to be sick, he has to go to sea; tries to get up, but can only raise his head from the pillow; he must get up, he fumbles over the bedclothes with his big, feeble hands, has letters to write, looks about him and wipes his ailing eyes, to think that they should be bad again now! The room seems misty to him, he does not know that he is nearly blind. Movement is quite impossible, he is perfectly stiff, the sea salt that has got into his joints; bad luck to have such a poor day just when he has so much to see about. But still he has been worse before, he thinks, that time two years ago in Jamaica when he lay for weeks like a dead man.

Patience; and the Admiral has the Scriptures read to him, dictates with closed eyes, sends for people and has long conferences about what is to be done; though he speaks in a scarcely audible voice he keeps his servants busy, the room is like a highway where everybody is coming and going, very respectful gentlemen who shake their heads as they leave. But the Admiral is busy all day long,

lying anchored in his bed with his long frame crippled with rheumatism, snow-white and with deep-sunk eyes, looking like a centenarian though he is still some way off sixty; he is busy all day long, muttering and muttering, the invincible mind flaming incessantly behind the drawn forehead and beneath the closed eyes, over which the brows already yawn with the hollow shadow of death.

Great difficulties at this time, disagreements with the King, always those rights they had taken from him and which he had not yet recovered; opposition, enemies on every hand, infringements of his proprietary rights, and on the top of that delays, delays, hindrances that had to be got rid of before he could come to the real business, a new voyage, God willing, the fifth . . . and when that was successfully accomplished, for now he must succeed, there was the raising of an army and the crusade against Constantinople! The Turk to be driven out of Europe! Christ's sepulchre restored to Christendom! The opening of the Millennium! Much to lay his hand to, when once he had surmounted a mass of worries, and found Eldorado in the meantime, and a vexatious thing to have his old sea trouble tormenting him again when time was so precious.

Thus worked his ever-busy brain, the only part of him spared by four long laborious voyages of discovery, twelve years of toil and disappointment, since the year he had found San Salvador; but had he always kept his brain clear, had he not rambled now and then, seeing how incomprehensible, enigmatical and tantalizing the world persisted in appearing to him?

Ah yes, they were twelve bitter years; it pained him not in his limbs alone to look back on them; years of suffering, full of fatigue, never an affliction was he spared, sleepless,

long, hard, anxious, fruitless years! Ever since his first homeward voyage after the discovery, when he had to pay for the easy, untroubled outward passage, and was tossed about in the *Niña* in fearful storms, storms, storms, till all hope of seeing land again was abandoned; the Atlantic in its murky might, the *Niña* riding over mountains of water, from one abyss into another, incredible that the little craft could do it! Yes, there she was pounded and buffeted by the waves, and rolled and flung into such a depth that it seemed as if clouds and seas were flying straight into heaven; there they stood in dripping wet clothes day after day for weeks, watching till they simply could not close their eyes again. . . . Ah, yes, that was the pain he still felt.

Then the second voyage: the beautiful island of Jamaica, *Santa Gloria*, the airs of Paradise that haunted his nostrils there, the fruitless hunt for the mainland, the strain, eye trouble, headwinds home, distress and shortage of food in the ships; the failure of the colonies, the King's ill-humour, Spain full of enemies.

Third voyage: still the vain hunt for the passage to India, the private probing of the coasts for the Kingdom of Heaven; a more southerly route this time, Trinidad, the mouths of the Orinoco and the great freak of nature where the mighty freshwater stream meets the Equatorial Current.

This time Columbus was within an ace of it, he got into a whirlpool with his ships and turned a trifle giddy: here at last was eloquent proof of the proximity of the earthly Paradise, one of the great rivers that run from the source by the Tree of Life, the river from which the Deluge once came! The stars spun a little before his eyes, he felt he was under the sign of the Virgin, and interpreted his whole reckoning as a conjecture bordering on certainty that

the earth in these zones must have an immense wart on it, like a sort of supplementary earth; it was round, no doubt, but like a pear, and up at the point of this supplementary earth lay Paradise; that explained why the current was so strong and the volume of water that came from there was so vast, making the sea fresh for miles out, with a smell of vegetation, full of mud and torn-up plants: no question about it, such a stream must come from the Garden of Eden!

Other observations pointed to the proximity of Paradise: in a bay Columbus caught sight at a distance of pink-winged creatures bathing, by all appearance angels. Seamen with undamaged eyes thought they were a kind of long-legged pink birds with long necks and a broken beak, flamingoes; but they did not contradict the Admiral in his hearing.

Columbus thought he had been nearer to Heaven, literally speaking, on this voyage than ever before; and his own deluded, rainbow-coloured letter should be read; a great soul speaks in it in spite of all, we can feel the beating of a heart like the very pulse of the world, the rivers had infected him, he had touched the earth like the Greek hero and had regained his hold of the marvellous—hope, hope will never die!

And the heart-breaking letter he wrote to the King after his fourth and last voyage should be read, when he had sailed as a private person and was not even allowed to land in his own colony, which was now administered by others. For he returned from the third voyage as a prisoner, deprived of all his dignities; that was the end of it, and the fetters he had worn were hanging at this moment above his bed. That they had done to him, and never after could he recall the injustice without weeping; that and a

life of sleepless nights, salt of the sea and salt tears, that is what made his room seem so misty.

But then on this last voyage he lived to see Bobadilla's death! Yes, there is a God in Heaven. He would not even let Columbus put into harbour, this man who had thrown him into chains; and when Columbus predicted a gale, he knew better, was churlish and sailed out with his ships and his cargo of stolen gold, injustice, cruelty and lies—and was never heard of again! No, God may be long-suffering, but still a noxious beast may goad him into opening a hole in the sea.

Then Columbus felt his way along the coast of Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, new rich coasts all of them, but no way through; and then the unspeakable sufferings when he was stranded on Jamaica and lay there without ships for many, many months, sick, half-blind, without the slightest hope of rescue, starving, so that he had to juggle with an eclipse of the moon to get food from the savages; then the homeward voyage, against contrary currents and head-winds; a complete wreck when he saw Spain again after a lapse of two and a half years.

Thus the twelve years had gone by, and they had since become fourteen. And now he would be off again. That river mouth was worth attempting. That Paradise lay where the river came from was beyond a doubt, but he had no great hope of being able to sail up against the stream. He would try it. Improved ships, perhaps with oars, nothing was impossible. And then the crusade to Constantinople was urgent, it wouldn't do to lie here any longer, he had to get up. . . .

And the Admiral tries again to raise himself but only gets his head a little way from the pillow, like an insect that has been trodden into the dust and moves a leg now

and again, life that will live, when flight is over for ever.

At night the Admiral is alone, and in the long sleepless hours he hears the wind howling in the doorways, a being that finds a voice and calls, the Wanderer; and he sees the waves before him, as he lies there with closed eyes, he is on board his ship listening to the wind's harp, its strings are about him as they have been all his life: I'm coming, I'm coming, is the answer in his soul; and they two, the Wanderer without in the night, the excluded but ever calling, and he within who is anchored down, they blow together, sigh, roar and pass on their way through the long black night, through many nights, many nights and long.

But at last the song has a deeper note and comes from farther away, perhaps the Admiral does not know whether he is dreaming or awake or where he really is, *when* it is; the howling wind awakes a soul within his soul, old forgotten springs burst forth, and with the wind's mournful ballad in his ears, the most mournful of ballads, he sinks in a sea of melancholy:

The wind is sighing, O hear it wander!
A lost soul strays through the world out yonder.
Oh, ho, huh. . . .

Like children crying, alone and weary,
Till early morning—is aught so dreary?
Oh, ho, huh. . . .

As lonely children we wept full often,
'Mid howling blasts that a stone would soften.
Oh, ho, huh. . . .

Since then we slept in so many places,
With sighing bosoms and mournful faces.
Oh, ho, huh. . . .

Then infants filled all our house with crying.
Now we are left with the midnight sighing.
Oh, ho, huh. . . .

Ah, can it be that we still may hear them,
In howling wind can we still be near them?
Oh, ho, huh. . . .

Like childbed pangs or like childless mother,
Like tears of Fate that no time can smother.
Oh, ho, huh. . . .

To pain is turned all our gladness vanished,
'Tis gone, but ne'er from our memory banished.
Oh, ho, huh. . . .

We hate the cry of a sinful action,
But life unlived is a worse distraction.
Oh, ho, huh. . . .

The dead are witness in deep graves sleeping
That life has brought them but sighs and weeping.
Oh, ho, huh. . . .

Beneath the stars is there aught that's lasting?
The wind alone in eternal blasting.
Oh, ho, huh. . . .

A thousand years shall the wind still wander.
The ancient woe shall return out yonder.
Oh, ho, huh. . . .

And then it came upon him in his last hour, at last he received his sight when the light from without no longer made impression on his eyes, in a clear inner world he saw that he *had* been there, on the happy isle he had hunted for, the isle of youth, in the days when his children were little.

Philippa!

The far-off days in Lisbon when he was a young man, with a knowledge of the sea from the time when, as a big-limbed lad, he ran away from his father's weaver's workshop and disappeared in one of the ships lying in the port of Genoa, where it had been his boyish delight to hang about, until the sea claimed him; rough years which made a man of him. Then the book which absorbed him more and more, the cosmography that he studied whenever he was ashore, while his companions were out rioting, science and cartography—the convent at Lisbon where the young mate and cartographer entered to kneel and make his devotions among the holy images, surrounded by incense and the tones of the organ and the beautiful choir of women's voices—one voice more lovely than all the rest, which he could single out as a high, clear, silvery ray from earth to heaven amid the hum of sound: Philippa's voice!

Nor was it long before he spied out, eyes and ears helping each other, from whom the voice came, a slender young maiden with narrow cheeks, black and white, the most beautiful black hair and great, dark, warm eyes, looking like a seraph when she opened her throat and with delicate parted lips sent her wonderfully pure notes swelling out into space.

But when he made discreet inquiries and learned that she was nobly born, Philippa Moñez Perestrello, daughter of the distinguished navigator and Governor, a family far, far too high for a plain mate to raise his eyes to—ah, then he was unhappy, without even the boldness to look upon himself as crossed in love; then he was a giant brought low, who might be seen by himself on lonely walks outside the town, weary with thinking, with his eyes on God's birds up in the trees, gently shaking his head; a cartographer who

neglected his rolls of paper but with a heavy heart put on his best clothes, striped hose of different colours, as was the mode, combed his hair, and never, never failed to appear in the Convent of All-Hallows when the choir sang there; a man with a fine ear for music and a pair of devout blue eyes turned towards the stalls where the choir were singing.

Could it be possible? . . . passionate incredulity, hope, a resolve to die, violent weeping with cap before the eyes, wooing, days of emotion and disquiet, the dew of love all over him—the unbelievable, that *she, she would have him,* had seen him every day in the church and now told him impossible things of *her* thoughts! Philippa!

Lisbon and the blessed garden where they met and all was well and with a great sigh she gave herself into his hands, content that he was so ruddy and uncouth a giant.

Ah, she was like the damsel sung in every ballad, with a train about her feet, clad in samite and marten, trustful, with smiling eyes and her throat full of song, love all through!

And then came the happy years at Porto Santo, the island remote from the world, framed by the long, thundering, sun-illumined Atlantic rollers, clothed in the hum of solitude and roofed over at night with constellations vaunting in a sky of southern purple, full of great visions and mirages by day over the endless unknown ocean, the heavens a blaze of fire morning and evening when the sun came and went.

Here in a blissful solitude, all in all to each other, their little son was born and they were three, a new little whimper on a desert isle, a helpless life shaded by Philippa's black hair and protected by her long, tender hands.

How is it with man—is it that the greater his happiness,

the more he demands from it, a fire that feeds our longing?

For we think that life is long; then looking back on it we see that a few sleeveless errands have devoured the years and that there is no turning back.

An unavoidable expedition to Guinea, to England, his head full of Perestrello's papers and charts, which Columbus had with his wife; plans of discoveries, voyages, the fourteen years of wandering, *all preparatory*—but gone was Porto Santo, Philippa resting eternally with crossed hands in the *Piedad* chapel of Carmelite Convent at Lisbon; Diego, when he saw him one time, a tall, slight boy who was annoyed when given an apple, another time a page at the court of Isabella, already heavy about the eyelids, displeased when his father appeared with his ungainly walk; Diego Columbus, whose name the other pages and their friends underlined with tar.

But never had there been greater happiness than at Porto Santo when the little boy got on his feet and for the first time in high delight ventured a step from his father's arms to his mother's knee. Never had any wound left a deeper scar than when the boy, as they were tramping to Palos, his hand in his father's and said he was hungry, and he had to beg bread for him.

There is a sound in the room as of a dog barking; the blind dying man does not know that it is the heart in his throat.

II

SOUTH OF THE SOUTH

IN the winter of 1832–33 a British brig, the *Beagle*, lay off Tierra del Fuego, trying for twenty-four days to round Cape Horn from east to west, but was obliged to give it up and sailed through one of the channels among the islands which now bears the name of the ship.

More than three hundred years before Magellan had found the passage here, a little to the north, the first man to sail from the Atlantic into the Pacific, the passage Columbus sought for in vain, and the first circumnavigation of the globe. Few dreamed that it was necessary to go so far to the south, right down towards the South Pole, to find a way through, across the Line and down into regions where the climate became raw again as in the North, but with the year turned round, opposite seasons, and with the "South," the warmth and fertility, to the northward; a world on the farther side of hope, new, but a strangely lifeless repetition of the old.

On board the *Beagle* was a young naturalist, Charles Darwin, then twenty-three; the cruise was undertaken with scientific objects and he was the zoologist of the expedition, a tall, rather lanky young gentleman, slow in his movements, beetle-browed, but with genial blue eyes, a bottle-nose which, as he tells us himself, was an annoyance to him and nearly got him rejected for the expedition—and yet it was the keenest nose aboard the *Beagle;* if the ship was the sleuth-hound of the century he was its inmost sense.

The final intellectual conclusion of the voyages of discovery, from Columbus to Cook, was drawn by him. Before becoming acquainted with primitive man, humanity had viewed itself from within in the light of sensibility, God's image; now it was forced to view itself from without, in the light of its origin; Darwin took the backward step. He was hated for it as the one who with a miscreant's hand dragged man down from his height; in reality his thoughts were directed by a profound philanthropy, he drew the despised "savage" up to the breast of civilization as the distant kinsman who stands between the white man and the beast.

When Darwin first had his great idea of the origin of species and their inner mutual kinship as different stages of the same manifestation of life, and what concrete impressions suggested it, he does not tell us, perhaps it was not clear to himself; an impulse of feeling may have been the first point of departure.

It may have come to him in an obscure form, the first subterranean subsidence in his mind, in Tierra del Fuego. Though he himself has nothing about it, his artless description of the Fuegians shows that he was deeply moved; here he was close to the animal and yet pity and sympathy bound him to these outcasts thrust into uttermost misery as to brothers who had fared badly, but still brothers; his heart bled for them, he went as far as he could to meet them, as a zoologist he voluntarily abandoned the old proud charter of humanity and came down into dangerous proximity with the quadruped, well, well, and at last he went the whole length. With his knowledge of apes and after seeing the Fuegians there was nothing else for him to do; they could not come to him, Darwin came to them.

An expansion of feeling and a recognition, the legitima-

tion of mankind's poorest relations, not excluding those farther down either, tail and all, that was the fine step that was taken, from the voyages of discovery to the doctrine of evolution, in itself an evolution, by Darwin, whenever and in whatever connection the idea as an idea may have originated in his brain.

For those four-and-twenty days the *Beagle* lay off Cape Horn sawing backwards and forwards, a zigzag far to the south, till all land was out of sight, and back again towards the foggy, wind-swept promontory, without making way against the ceaselessly raging westerly gales, as it were a barrier of wind raised here to cut off access to the other ocean; during those days there was time for much thought and of many things.

A factor was not wanting to give exercise in humility and candour, a sufficiency of danger, isolation; here they lay in a lonely brig far outside the world's beaten track, totally forgotten by Europe, and who would ever have thought of them again, whom would it have concerned—a surveying vessel lost some time in the thirties—if they had not come home with their momentous cargo of knowledge and a new view of nature?

Nature did its best to wipe them out, fell upon the hard-pressed ship with violent squalls, washed her from stem to stern, broke seas over her on every side and weighed her down, dragged right under water, till every nail in her hull quivered and she only righted herself with the utmost difficulty, shook off the water and lay trembling and motionless like a creature struck to the very marrow by a jet. A world of semi-darkness it was down here, bitterly cold seas, rarely a gleam of sunshine through the ragged flying clouds; and when they were up under the land on their long vain

beat there was the prospect of the steep and mournful antarctic coast of Tierra del Fuego, glaciers calving into the straits, wet, misty, sleety forests, foam flying from the breakers far into the inhospitable shore, and hail-showers scourging the barren mountains of the archipelago.

And here dwelt men! Now as in Magellan's time a gleam shone here and there ashore at night, a pillar of smoke in the daytime, man's ancient beacon, which told of the immeasurably rude, inhumanly hardened people who lived here in life's beginning, without hope of ever coming any farther, for they had entered one of Nature's blind alleys, they had come south of the South. Time itself was not the same here, lacking a calendar, the chilly light-forsaken morning of the ages, the glimmering misery we know when we have watched all night and day dawns in a grey, unreal, hope-abandoned twilight.

In such an ebb-tide of the soul, half-light within and without, it befell the little company on board the *Beagle* to meet the Flying Dutchman.

Unhistorical this, no written accounts of it, either from the hand of Captain Fitz Roy or Darwin or any one else on board; such things are not even talked about, they are hushed up, or one doesn't trust one's own senses after the event, putting it down to fatigue, hallucination perhaps, after days and nights of sleeplessness and hard work.

But even regarding it as improbable, a lie if you will, it gives one a cold shiver down the back to imagine the encounter. It is in the grey dawn, doubly gloomy in these latitudes which are always gloomy, and only the white foam on the crests of the waves shines with a cold light like phosphorus in a cellar. The *Beagle* is close-hauled with the wind on her starboard bow, heeling hard over, reefed almost to the yards, thumping in the seas as though lashed

to her course, the Horn looming ahead through the mist like a hoary head from which thin white hairs are flying in the westerly gale; a good deal of leeway again to-day, storm and current seem to keep the ship in the same spot in spite of all the distance sailed—then it is that they sight a ship astern to leeward, the first they have seen for many weeks; suddenly she appears within the narrow horizon which lies like a grey ring in the sea—but what's that? she's sailing *against* the wind!

In a few moments the ship had passed them, for an instant a collision seemed inevitable; the strange ship came sweeping along under full sail against the wind, like a thunderstorm, rocking from side to side like a ship running free and climbing up and down over the waves; she seemed to be sailing in her own gale, directly contrary to the one that was blowing; not a very big vessel when she came nearer, a kind of barque-rigged schooner—but what kind of a schooner, what a way for a ship to behave, what sort of a rig was that?

Rapidly the vessel came near in the grey, poor light, strangely clear though the air was within the ring of leaden water; her hull was clearly seen, a curiously short hull, high fore and aft like a swing, and she moved in the water like a segment of a wheel, rolling her bow down and ploughing up the sea in a collar round it as though trying to stand on her head, checking her way and rolling up again, advancing a little on her stern with the masts pointing aft and flapping sails, sticking her nose into it again, but on she came; and before the silent crew of the *Beagle* had time to recover themselves, before any one exchanged a word, they saw the sailer run past with her broadside towards them, two or three little open gun-ports, richly carved stanchions and rails around the lofty castles fore and aft; near and yet

strangely indistinct, as though the sea showed through the whole vessel, she swept by, rocking her high and narrow stern, with its carvings and little windows whose panes were like flies' eyes, a great unlighted polygonal lantern high up aft; in flying foam, up and down between the hollow waves, she was now visible, now lost again, till she ran beyond the narrow horizon on the other side up in the eye of the wind. The storm raised a squall, lashing salt drops from below and a scourge of hail from above; behind this curtain the stranger vanished, and nobody asked his companion whether it was a vision they had seen or a real vessel, whether they were living men or dead they had made out behind the taffrail of the rolling mist-grey vessel, or who was the tall man who stood on the poop with his great white head held high amid the squall. Nobody spoke of what he had seen, and afterwards it was buried in the secret chambers of the soul as a thing he kept to himself and could not communicate.

But the captain wore his ship round, gave up his obstinate attempt to force a passage south of Cape Horn, whether he had privately accepted the omen, or came to see that it was impossible.

Meeting the Phantom Ship is supposed to mean shipwreck, this did not hold good here in a literal sense; on the other hand it meant that the fatal hour had struck for the whole fundamental view of life on which the mental edifice of Europe rested.

But the *Santa Maria* continued her ghostly voyage south of Cape Horn, round the Cape of Good Hope, across the oceans, round the world, into every remote channel, past every island, as she must so long as the yearning lasts which once fitted her out to sail for the Lost Country.

A strange ship, more powerful as a memory than she ever was in reality. Of the old tub, built for trade, which was taken by chance for that memorable voyage, there may possibly be left even to-day some timbers or nails deeply buried in coral-rag on the West Indian coast where she stranded on Christmas night 1492 and broke up at once, incapable of sustaining her own weight without the water to hold her together; the coral grew about the wreck, Time's layer upon layer, and there the mortal remains of the *Santa Maria* are nobly preserved; but neither iron nor any other solid is imperishable as is the ship that passed into the ages.

A spacious ship, in all respects the image of a caravel but without bounds when seen from within, capacious and airy as our memories, our dreams, the yearning of the dead which reaches us, and our yearning which can never let them go.

And there they are, all the yearners and discoverers who craved to see the earth, the great names—nothing but vocal sounds, like an organ pealing in the soul, but true music—*Columbus, Vasco da Gama, Bartolomeu Diaz, Cabral, Balboa, Cabot, Magellan, Frobisher, Hudson, Cook!*

Storms, seas, vast new continents, mountain ranges, rivers and channels which they opened up have for ever become one with their names; the discovery of America, the sea route to India, the circumnavigation of Africa, the discovery of Brazil, the Pacific seen for the first time by the eyes of a man and named, Labrador, the whole northern passage opened; the first circumnavigation of the globe, to the everlasting memory of the unswerving, indomitable Portuguese; the thrusts up north into Arctic waters locked by ice; the navigation of the South Seas and Australia.

There they are, all the later travellers, pioneers and map-

makers who gave their names to rivers and mountains, the bridegrooms of the Mississippi, the Amazon, the revealer of Chimborazo, the man who saw Ruwenzori for the first time as a cloud in the sky and who scattered the darkness of Africa, Stanley, white-haired and worn-out before his time, a man without an equal; the scent and expanse of the earth, all the trees and beasts, the varied babble of colour, all the breath of the open air surrounds you when you live their lives over again in their company.

And there are the first nameless subduers of Nature, before the days of history, who began to pry about in their surroundings and to ponder over means of making themselves their masters, the first unknown leaders on mankind's long journey out of primeval darkness; the man who tamed fire and made movement possible, the inventor of the boat and the car, the first horseman; here are those who tamed beasts and sowed corn in the earth; here are the ravenous seafarers who opened up the world with their sharp sword, the Vikings on their sea-steeds; here they are, all the seekers and strivers.

The wind, *anima*, that first conception of the soul, the earliest of impulses, from the time the air first enters the lungs of the newborn babe with a scream till he gives up the ghost in a sigh: to taste the breeze of many lands between birth and death, that was their soul, that was the rhythm of their lives.

III

AT HOME

BUT now, is the phantom sailor, the flying skipper, never to find peace? Is there not some condition that sets him free, if he can see it and fulfil it?

There is. The condition provides that if he can acknowledge when he is himself, he shall be redeemed. Impossible, no man can do that. That is why he has already sailed for centuries, with the prospect of being at sea till Doomsday.

But supposing the terms are that if only he is able *afterwards,* when he has sailed for such and such a time and had occasion to look back and reflect, to recognize at what moment of his life and in what respect he came nearest to realizing himself as a man—even if during all the rest of his life his desires and conduct were other than properly accorded with his nature—he shall find peace. This comes about at the moment when he returns wholly and in truth to his own nature.

And when this acknowledgment comes to him, these things shall be seen, as it were a recurrence in his soul:

The storm, which the phantom skipper always carries along with him and always sails in, shall subside, a calm shall follow, clear weather, and with dazzled eyes the skipper shall find his altitude, the correct one at last; and then the old sea-worn vessel of eternity beneath him will spread out and become an island, securely moored in the sea, the deck will turn green and become a cool Northern

plain giving off a scent of mould and grassy sweetness and covered with flowers, a cool and humble show, but here the nights are light and bees and flowers consort in the mild honeyed air of noon. Broad is the land, no mean island after all, a mighty continent, more than room enough; if the old salt-stained ocean-farer has had the elements for his world within his narrow hull, he will have room to expand and stretch himself on the firm land to which it is now transformed.

But the sails swell and become great domed clouds in the sky, roofing the summer day like a cool tent and casting slow-moving shadows upon the earth, smiling pastures, forests and lakes blended together.

The masts burst into leaf, from every knot a branch shoots out, the top expands like a banner of fresh foliage, yards and spars change into trees, there is a murmur as of a breeze of spring, a blaze of pale green and a fresh leafy scent, the wood is fully out and trembles in its cool bright garment beneath swelling white clouds and blue patches of sky, sun and shade blending like a refreshing draught among the slender Northern trees.

And behold, all the carvings and ornaments of the old ship have come to life, the stag steps out of his convolutions and stretches his legs, casts off his larva of artistry and wanders easily among the trees with rocking antlers, his muzzle nibbling at the sweet dewy leaves. The squirrel leaps out of his scroll-work, straightens his twisted limbs and flies into the colour of life, the reddest of reds, and up he darts like a flame, clutching the trunk with all his paws, rearing his lively tail and vanishing in the top of a birch. Out of the woodwork, from holes and corners of the carving, fly the birds, the hawk sailing in slow flight above the tree-tops and circling on the wing, the owl shunning the

light and flapping noiselessly as a moth among the branches, losing itself in a shadow; song-birds whirring out and distributing themselves upon the hanging leafy twigs, puffing out their feathered throats in song.

But now comes the greatest marvel, the *Santa Maria's* figure-head, the Mother of God with the Child, comes to life and seats herself on the grass beneath the fresh green trees, the young mother with her first-born in her lap, life over again from the beginning, under the open sky, springtime, the forest, childhood!

Yes, life begun over again, in the person of a young settler's wife, who leaves the log-hut on the first warm day to sun her baby and sits with her fair hair uncovered in the sunshine; the blows of an axe reach her ears from the forest hard by, the strong man, carpenter, tiller of the soil and hunter in one: the family founded again in a wild spot, Canada, the depths of Minnesota or Dakota, where Northern peasants find again their own weather and their seasons, and where the hard winters keep them strong of soul.

As she sits under a tree with hand to brow shading the sun, shy of the light and silent, alone in a great loneliness, but with her child in her arms and the rhythm of her husband's labour within hearing, so sat the young Longobard woman before her, on a clearing in Skoane, with her big legs in a hempen skirt, a homely shift and nothing else but a shock of yellow hair like sunlight in the forest. Behind the tree under which she sat with her plump golden son, her cow was grazing. And the settler's wife has hers where she can find them.

Thus an old world has moved over and become new. The ship has changed to fields and forest. All has turned to what it was in the beginning; every sailor has become an earthworm, and hurried into the ground.

But the tall white skipper becomes yet whiter, rises from the ground and dissolves into a shred of mist or sea fog that comes from the beach and drifts in under the trees, till it vanishes altogether in the sunshine; and in the place where he stood there is nothing but a little heap of dust and some withered last year's leaves.

The Long Journey is ended.

IV

AVE STELLA

IN the hour between night and morning, when the last have gone home and the first are not yet up, the great city's brief hour of torpor when it seems as though all life is extinguished and the streets lie all gaunt and empty, like the veins of a body drained of its blood, an artificial, faded world of stone—in this hour a Being appears in heaven, leaning out over the world and looking; a Woman, formed of light upon light, almost invisible.

It is the earth she is watching, and she sees how the beautiful blue globe rolls in its æther and slowly turns its flanks to the sun, always night on one side and day on the other, wrapped the whole way round in a cloak of water, tense and refracting like an immense drop, and amid the blue the shrivelled crusts of the continents and their green and motley land; the transparent atmosphere above, stirred by clouds and air currents, like a veil about the earth's blue nakedness—a lovely coloured ball in space, engaged for æons, with a monotony that knows no varying, in turning and lighting itself equally on every side while at the same time it goes in a great orbit round the mighty luminary in whose beams it bathes.

If the super-terrestrial Being descends lower she sees the immense extent of oceans and continents, countries and realms and all the life there is in them, ships moving over the seas all round the ball, trains hastening across the continents from coast to coast, great cities shrouded in

smoke, arteries of traffic peppered full of people, in every zone, from both the Poles to the Equator, all the Earth's motley, teeming, fantastic circle of countries, peoples, animals, plants and things, fixed and definite things, the sea blue, raw and wet the whole way round, the greensward green, and not a spot anywhere on earth but it is directly in contact with space, every blade of grass stretching straight out into the Universe as far as it can reach.

The great old river cities with their cathedrals and town-walls, now only the trace of a narrow ring lost in the city's heart—and a widespread network of streets outside like great crystalline scars on the earth; not one but many, many bridges over the river, where once a single ferry-boat splashed across from forest to forest; of the forest nothing left but a reconstruction in the form of parks—and from the whole monster a heavy grating rumble, the interminable note of the city, rising up towards heaven.

She above hears it and looks down, wondering, clutches at her heart; and not one of those below has an inkling of the sympathy felt for them in eternity, of the pain and deep pity with which a loving heart, unable to help, follows their doings.

Who is she? The rolling Earth, what is it? Why? What is this phantom ship in eternity, abandoned entirely to itself among spheres it cannot reach, with a terrible amount of lore about them, but no help from that, just as much alone; what is it carrying, why, whither? At the very moment when the chemist is busy with his tubes and his mysterious rays, the inmost life of matter, negroes are lying in wait for each other behind anthills with long assegais; what is their object, what is working in them both, how did it all begin, and how will it end?

Schoolboys ask questions; the rest go about their business and multiply, build or pull down, and die.

But the cosmic Being that appears over the earth as a Woman to those who can see her, she is Life, the stem of Life beyond the æther, from which the germs have come to earth; true Life, the source of Love, of which we can know no more than longing teaches us.

Have the creatures of Earth, through a long process of life and change—approximate, faulty, abandoned and taken up again—been seeking a form for an eternal, intrinsic, unknown type existing on other stars?

Ave Stella!

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